DATTATREYA TRADITION

(DATTA-PARAMPARA)

VOLUME III: SOME FAMOUS SAINTS IN DATTATREYA TRADITION

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DATTATREYA TRADITION (*DATTA-PARAMPARA*) VOL III of Three Volumes

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(*DATTA-PARAMPARA*)

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VOLUME III:

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

More than a decade ago, from July 1997 to October 1999 I had published a ten part series titled DATTA-PARAMPARA in the magazine SAI - ARPAN, a quarterly publication of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Spiritual and Charitable Trust Mumbai, at the request of its President Dr Amiya Kumar Sahu. The series covered information on Shri Dattatreya, biographies of his four avatars Shipad Shrivallabh, Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Shri Manik Prabhu. In the later part of the series short biographies of some famous disciples of Shri Swami Samarth and of some famous Dattatreya Devotees were also included.

While writing the articles I was intrigued by many issues like when Dattatreya was born and what was the name of the Atri rishi who was Dattatreya's father. It struck me much later that in the Puranas as well as in the Epics whenever rishis were mentioned in the narrative of events they ere mentioned only by their generic family names such as Atri and Vasishta without specifying the actual personal name of the individual irrespective of the era in which the event occurred. This gave an appearance as if the particular rishi, if not immortal, lived throughout the centuries. Thus Atri is mentioned as one of the *saptarshis*, (the seven mind-sons of Brahma the creator) who marries Anasuya the daughter of Kardama rishi (or of Daksha according to some other Puranas) and is mentioned in connection with the activities of various kings in different generations that followed right upto the time of Rama in the Ramayana. I also subsequently realized that the so called *saparshis* were not contemporaries but lived in different time periods. Bunching them together as *Saptarshi* group was more of the typical Puranic symbolism than reality. This fact however has been traditionally glossed overby everybody whether he is a pious reader with tendency to believe everything in the "holy" text put before him or a discriminating scholar with capacity to discern fact from fiction. For example Dr P. N. Joshi in his monumental work "Dattatreya Dnyankosha" extols the qualities of Dattatreya's father Rishi Atri but what he actually does is list the qualities mentioned in the ancient texts against "rishi Atri" without considering the fact that these qualities did not belong to a single individual but different individuals who lived in different ages. He even mentions Shubhatreyi as a daughter of Atri not mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya. This was confusing until I came across the work of Shrikant Talageri (**The Rigveda- A Historical Analysis**) in which he lists the names of 37 different rishis of Atri lineage who have composed hymns in the Rigveda, but none of whom could be Dattatreya's father. I used to think mistakenly for some time that the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya were the same as the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the Ramayana ans was puzzled because Ramayana does not mention any children to this Atri couple and definitely not Dattatreya. But in the course of further reading my misconception vanished and was replaced by the questions: "What was the personal name of the Atri rishi who was Dattarteya's father and anasuya's husband?, "When did he live?

Analysing the problem, it was clear that what was needed was a chronological scale for locating the various Atris on a time-line and look for the plausible parents of Dattatreya. I had to turn to the works of the scholars in ancient literature. Fortunately I came across some works on the ancient Indian History, especially the following: (i) *Early Hindu India – A Dynastic Study* by A. Muzumdar in which the author has given a chronology and has tried to interpret the Puranic events in historical terms, (ii) the scholarly works of Mr M. R. Yardi (See Bibliography) on the present structure of Ramayana and Mahabharata in which he has shown how the original texts by Valmiki and Vyasa were corrupted by Romaharshan Suta, his son Sauti (fifth century BC), Harivanshakara (second century BC) and others who inserted chronologically absurd stories of their own imagination e.g. about Rama's meeting Vishwamitra and Parshurama both of whom lived several centuries earlier to him; (iii) the scholarly works of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*Retrieval of History from Puranic Myths*, *Vedic Religion and Culture* and *India in the Vedic Age*). Chronology of kings of the Aryan dynasties was obviously necessary to arrive at a solution to my doubts. This made me look to the chronology of events mentioned in the Puranas and the epics. Following the lead given by Muzumdar I attempted first to work out a chronology with the help of the genealogies of kings given in Bhagwat Purana. When the names of the kings of the so-called Solar and Lunar dynasty kings were sequentially listed

from Vaivaswat Manu onwards the results were found to be ridiculous. This tabulation showed Ramas's time as later than Krishna's and Yudhishtira was shown as not a contemporary of Krishna. Obviously the genealogies given in the Bhagwat Purana were corrupted. Finally the last mentioned work of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*India in the Vedic Age*) answered many of my doubts. Having found the anomalies Bhargava corrected for and explained the anomalies using the contemporous events mentioned in the various Vedic texts. Using the corrected dynasty list tables from Vaivaswat Manu onwards and using 1100 BC as the date of Mahabharata war suggestd by him it was possible to create a chronological table of kings and rishis assuming an average period of a kings reign. Different people have used different regnal periods from about 18 to 25 years. Bhargava suggests it to be 20 years. Therefore I made a chronological table with this value of regnal period.

Two questions then remained: (i) Which Atri was Dattateya's father who was also the father of Soma and Durvasa and whose wife was named Anasuya? (ii) Dattatreya is said to have had six disciples: Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna, king Alarka and Parashurama. It was necessary that times of these disciples match those of the Atri who was Dattatreya's father. Where the six disciples contemporary?

Literature search showed the following points: (i) None of the 37 Atris mentioned by Talageri were associated with Dattatreya. (ii) Only Ramayana Atri's wife was named Anasuya. (iii) The story of Kardama Muni's daughter Anasuya having married Atri as given in Bhagwat and some other Puranas is imaginary because Atri according to this story was one of the Saptarshis and the story of Saptarshi is a Puranic myth since the Rishis listed therein were not contemporary but lived in different ages. Also, Atri (and names of other rishis like Vasishtha, Bhrigu etc.) used in the Puranas are generic names or Gotra names and not individual rishi names. (iv) The six disciples can be divided into two groups: Prahlada, Ayu and Yadu who lived around Vaivaswat Manu's time while Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama who lived six centuries later.

A careful scrutiny of Bhagwat Purana which gives the stories of the encounters of Prahlada and Yadu with Dattatreya showed that they had met an *Avadhuta* which some translators conveniently interpreted to be Dattatreya though without any basis. As regards Ayu the story seems to have been taken from another context that showed Dattatreya's Tantric connection and is given differently in the Markandeya Purana. It was clear that Dattatreya could not have been the Guru of Prahlada, Yadu and Ayu and hence Dattatreya could not have been born in Manu's time.

Next, when stories of the births of Soma and Durvasa given in the Mahabharata and Puranas were scrutinized it was noted that Atri's son Soma was born as a result of shedding of the immense effulgence gained by Atri after a severe penance. It does not mention his mother at all nor does it mention Durvasa. Also Soma lived around Vaivaswat Manu time because Soma's son Budha was married to Manu's daughter Ila. As regards Durvasa he was born according to Mahabharata as an avatar of Shiva but in a yajna performed after the sons of Tripurasura were killed. He has absolutely no connection with Atri. This established that the Puranas by taking stories from different contexts and different times have synthesized the mythical legend of Dattatreya's birth. They have also used the name of Anasuya, wife of Ramayana Atri in the myth. But the pious devotees have accepted this myth and the image of Dattatreya in their minds is that of a Trimurti (in present times depicted by a three-head-six arm image) who is a celibate wandering yogi wandering over the earth to grace his devotees. However, Dattatreya's being a celibate is also in doubt because according to Mahabharata Dattatreya was a sage belonging to Atri lineage (not Atri Rishi's son) who was a householder and had a son named Nimi and a beautiful grandson named Shriman whose death had caused Nimi a great sorrow.

Coming to question of the time of Dattatreya's birth, it became clear that the only way to zoom in to this date would be through the time of his later disciples namely: Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama. According to the earlier mentioned chronology developed by Bhargava this came to be about mid-25th century BC.

That the real historical image of Dattatreya contradicted the Puranic image must have been glaringly obvious to many historians but it is not clear why no one had pointed it out. But even after having found it to be so I was hesitant to make these findings public lest I hurt the feelings of the pious devotees.

However on further thinking I realized that the pious believe many things which are illogical and historically unacceptable and they are not really bothered about facts but to the devotion of a deity fixed in their minds. I recalled reading that the character of Radha, Krishna's consort from Gokul whose devotional love for Krishna is legendary and has been the subject of innumerable amorous as well as devotional songs (*Bhajans*) is according to scholars an imaginary character. She is not mentioned in Mahabharata, or in Harivansha or in the Bhagwat Purana. But Radha-Krishna is a highly popular pair of deities worshipped by millions not only in India but abroad as well, and is the main deity of ISKON sect. Meerabai, Chainatnya Mahaprabhu, Narasi Mehta and many other saints reached a high spiritual level through their worship and have composed many devotional songs describing the devotional love between Radha and Krishna. Thus it is not necesary that the idol of worship or the object of devotion be real and historical and a devotee does not reall bother about such things.
I came across an interesting statement in the biography of the great spiritualist philosopher scholar Gopinath Kaviraj (1887 – 1976) which confirmed this view. The biography mentions the opinion of the then well-known Brahmo Samjist thinker who remarked in the context of vision of Shri Krishna which Aurobindo had while in prison, that "**Whether Shri Krishna was real or not had nothing to do with the vision because it is quite possible that Historic Krishna and Krishna as a principle can exist independent of each other. One would experience according to one's feelings on the subject. Examples of these can be found in all religions including the Christian. Every saint cannot be a liar. The object of your devotion will make Itself appear according to how you imagine It to be**." Thus, a pious person will stick to his beliefs whatever may be evident intellectually. This gave me the impetus to write (in Part II) about issues like the concept of an avatar which the pious believe intrinsically and quote Bhagvad Gita which says that Bhagwan takes an avatar in different yugas to punish the evil, to save the saints and establish Dharma or the righteous way of life. The pious of course do not ask why there were no avatars to counter the atrocities of Hitler and the communist dictators or for that matter the present terrorism. No doubt these worldly issues and the spiritual domain are mutually exclusive.
The original Datta-parampara series did not give details of Dattatreya's advice to the disciples. I have included it in this book and summarized the advice to Parashurama given in the Tripura Rahasya even though it is somewhat removed from the spiritual practice of present day devotees.
After finalizing the first volume I gave a printed copy to my good friend and neighbor Mr. Gangadhar Gangathade I am grateful to him for pointing out some errors like the birthdates of Krishna and Yudhishtira which I have since corrected.
This work is currently available at the URL: www.vvshirvaikar.de which belongs to my good friend Mr. Dietrich Platthaus of Essen Germany. His help in putting it on internet and his critical comments have been invaluable.
I offer this at the feet of my guru Shri Shankar Maharaj without whose grace this work would not have been possible.
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PART I

SHRI SAI BABA OF SHIRDI

1. INTRODUCTION

So far we read about avatars of Dattatreya and some of their disciples. Later we shall read about some famous devotees of Dattatreya. In the present chapter we discuss the life and activities of Shri Sai Baba of Shird who has a special place among the Datta-Parampara saints. Some people consider him as an avatar of Dattatreya but he is not directly related to Dattatreya. Many visitors visited Sai Baba daily most of whom came for material gains and a few for spiritual gains; some came looking for his grace because they were in dire troubles and some came to test him whether he was really a holy man as many people thought. Some refused to see him because they would not even utter the name of any deity other than what they worshipped, whether it be Rama, or Vishnu or Shiva or Pandurang. But Sai Baba gave them the vision of their own deity in himself, converting them completely and bringing them to his fold.



Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi

Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi falls in a class by himself. He is not known to have initiated any disciples but he has given spiritual guidance to aspirants. But most people approached and are still approaching him even nine decades after his *mahasamadhi* for their worldly problems like desire for a child, especially a son, incurable illnesses and financial gains and he satisfies them all. That is why Baba probably has the highest number of devotees throughout India and abroad. His temples have been established in many countries east and west.

Actually, though his name is closely associated with Datta-parampara he himself was a devotee of Shri Rama. There is no outward connection between Baba and Shri Dattatreya but in many incidents it was indicated that he was no different from Shri Dattatreya. But then he also showed that he was no different from other deities too as will be seen later. The modes of the rituals at Shirdi, like the eternal fire, use of ashes, equal treatment to Hindus and Muslims etc. correspond to those of Nath Sect.

Mr. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, one of Baba's close devotees, has written Baba's biography "Shri Sai Satcharit" in Marathi verse form having fifty-two chapters. This is the holy book of Sai-devotees as much as Gurucharitra is for Datta-devotees. It was written with Baba's permission and in that respect it is unique. Baba used to lovingly call Mr. Dabholkar as Hemadpant. It is the name of a minister of Yadava dynasty famous for temple architecture in south India.

2. BABA'S APPEARANCE

Mr. Dabholkar has described Baba as follows: Baba was about five feet and six or nine inches tall, with unusually long hands which reached below his knees. He always used to wear a gown reaching up to ankles and his head used to be covered by a white cloth. Sometimes he used to wrap an orange cloth round his waist under the gown. He used to have a black stick, about the thickness of a thumb, which he used to call "satka". He also carried a tumbler, tobacco and a pipe. He was always barefoot. He used to sit on an old piece of gunny cloth and apply ash or "*udi*" on everybody who came to see him and also give away a little *udi* as *Prasad* for taking away. He could very often be seen sitting in Dwarkamai gazing in the continuously burning fire. The way he slept was very odd. There was a plank about six feet long and only about eight inches wide which hung from the ceiling supported by rags. He used to sleep mostly on this plank but nobody ever saw him climbing onto it or getting down from it.

Though Sai Satcharitra gives a number of anecdotes concerning Baba, the time factor is missing as in most of our religious literature. Some of Baba's devotees have done extensive research on Baba's origin, early life and chronology of events. For devotees the feeling of devotion is more important than chronology; however chronology makes the chart of Baba's life clearer. The account of his life and activities given in the following is partly based upon the chronology given by M.V. Kamath and V. B. Kher in their book "Sai Baba of Shirdi" (See Bibliography) as well as upon Sai Satcharitra.



Paduka of Sai Baba

3. BIRTH

Sai Baba was born sometime between 1838 and 1842 AD at Pathri in Marathwada. It is located about 16 Km from Manwat railway station on the Manmad-Secunderabad line. It was then in the Nizam ruled region. Most likely, he was born in the Bhusari family who were Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmins. Their family deity was Hanuman which explains Baba's love for Shri Rama. At the age of eight he left home with a Sufi Muslim fakir who was his guru. Name of this *fakir* is not known definitely. Dasganu, one of Baba's devotees mentions that Baba's guru was Mr. Gopalrao Deshmukh alias Babasaheb Subhedar of Sailu a town about 23 Km from Pathri. However Gopalrao's *samadhi* situated behind the Venkatesha temple dates 30 years before Baba's birth hence Mr. Gopalrao cannot be Baba's guru. Apparently Dasganu has given his

name without much inquiry. Baba had once told the story of his birth to Mhalsapati, according to which Baba was born in the family of a Deshastha Yajurvedi Brahmin in a village called Pathri and he was handed over to a Muslim fakir when he was a child.

Swami Sai Sharan Ananda (formerly Vaman Prangovind Patel) has said that Sai Baba told him that he was a Brahmin and his guru's name as Roshan Shah Mia. But he also opines that the name means Lord of Knowledge and could have been used figuratively by Baba. Whatever the name may be Baba did serve him for more than twelve years and when he passed away Baba buried him under or near the neem (*margosa*) tree in or near Navalkarwada in Shirdi.

Baba talked lovingly about his guru whom he served for twelve years. He was a great *auliya* and was a personification of love and kindness always in the highest state of samadhi. He became Baba's all-in-all, home, father and mother. He wanted nothing from Baba except faith and patience (***Shraddha*** and ***Saburi***) which Baba gave. These have become key words for all Sai-devotees. His guru taught him everything.

4. FIRST APPEARANCE IN SHIRDI

Sai Baba first appeared at Shirdi in 1851 (aged about 16 or 19 Years) and stayed in the village for two months. He resided day and night under a *Neem* tree which he claimed was growing over the tomb of his old Guru. After two months Baba disappeared from Shirdi.

Up to the age of 25 or 30 Baba wandered in the Paithan-Aurangabad region and probably elsewhere too. Then he stayed in Aurangabad for twelve years during which period he instructed a fakir named Bade Baba or Fakir Baba or *Fakir* Pir Mohanmmad Yasinmia. From here Sai Baba travelled widely in the Marathwada region and wandered to Dhoopkheda (or Dhoop) in Aurangabad District. It is this visit to Dhoop village that triggered the events that took him again to Shirdi sometime between 1868 and 1872.

Baba settles in Shirdi Chandbhai, a Muslim trader and *patil* of Dhoopkheda had lost his mare and was searching for it in the jungles near Dhoop village. Standing under a tree all tired, he noticed a young fakir with pink complexion and bright eyes, wearing a gown and cap rolling tobacco for his pipe. The fakir also saw him and asked him where he was going. When Chandbhai told about his lost mare he smiled and said that the mare was not lost but was grazing among the bushes nearby. Chandbhai went there and recovered his mare. He came back to the fakir and bowed before him, sure that he was an *Avaliya* with supernatural powers. The fakir signalled Chandbhai to sit down and asked him to light the pipe which he had just filled. Chandbhai was nervous because he did not have anything with him for lighting a fire. The fakir smiled, took tongs from under his arms and hit it against the rock and suddenly red-hot embers were burning on that rock. The fakir picked up one and lighted his pipe. Now the fakir wanted to moisten the cloth for the pipe and there was no water. Again the fakir generated water the same way and offered the pipe to Chandbhai. Greatly impressed, Chandbhai invited him to his home. The fakir promised to come three days later and did so as promised. Baba was treated as an honoured guest. Chandbhai requested Baba to join the marriage party which was going to Shirdi for his sister's marriage with Hamid the son of Aminbhai of Shirdi. Sai Baba gladly accepted. He stayed in Shirdi as guest of Aminbhai.

At Shirdi the party camped in the premises of the Khandoba temple under a banyan tree. The fakir was sitting under the tree smoking his pipe when Mhalsapati Sonar the owner and the priest of the temple who always welcomed and treated all holy visitors, felt attracted towards the fakir and addressed him, "Ya Sai (Welcome Sai)" in Marathi. Sai means Lord, God or fakir. The name stuck to the fakir who decided to stay in Shirdi. After marriage Chandbhai left Shirdi with Baba and returned to his village. However Baba returned to Shirdi alone two months later. He was then between 25 to 30 years of age.

After coming to Shirdi Baba first thought of staying in the nearby village Rahata and consulted Chandrabhan Seth who had business connections in Marathwada from where Baba had come. Seth offered him a place called Pawarwada belonging to Sand family but Baba decided to live in Shirdi. Baba loved Chandrabhanshet Marwadi of Rahata. After the demise of the Shet, Baba loved his nephew Khushalchand equally

or even perhaps more, and watched his welfare, day and night. Sometimes in a bullock cart, at other times in a Tonga with intimate friends, Baba went to Rahata. People of that village came out, with band and music, and received Baba at the border of the village and prostrated before him. Then he was taken into the village with great pomp and ceremony. Khushalchand took Baba to his house, seated him on a comfortable seat and gave him a good food. Then they talked freely and merrily for some time, after which Baba returned to Shirdi, giving delight and blessing to all.

Shirdi in Baba's time At that time population of Shirdi was 2568, living in about 400 houses. Besides Brahmins there were people of various professional castes like goldsmith, carpenter, ironsmith, tailor, potters as well as those belonging to scheduled caste engaged in trades like making leather and footwear. It was a small but self sufficient village with two wells, two schools, two orchards, nine temples, two mosques, one *dharmashala (pilgrim rest house)*, a sugar mill and a flour mill. According to a statement by Mrs Tarabai Tarkhad, wife of the manager of the Rajabahadur Textile mills Pune, there was no street lighting or any arrangement for sweeping roads.

5. EARLY DAYS IN SHIRDI

In Shirdi he stayed for about two and a half years in the *babul* forest and then under a neem (*margosa*) tree for another four to five years. He finally shifted to the dilapidated mosque. People cleaned the mosque which was later known as Dwarkamai. During this period Bayajabai mother of Tatya Kote Patil and wife of Narayan Teli, used to feed him as they could. Bayajabai had felt an intrinsic motherly love for Baba and had vowed she would not eat unless Baba ate first. She would go with the food basket in search of Baba in the woods and feed him. Baba also considered her as his mother. Later, Baba saved her son Tatya Patil from many difficulties and raised him socially, even risking his own life to save him.

A Divine Jewel In the early seventies Baba used to be very much alone. Only saintly people (like Bidkar Maharaj) visited him and he enjoyed those visits. At that time Shirdi sheltered two holy men one was Devidas who camped in the Maruti temple for last twelve years and the other was Janakidas Gosavi of the Mahanubhava sect. Another holy man, Mr. Gangagir Buwa of Puntambe used to visit Shirdi often. When he saw Baba in the Babul forest he remarked to Mr. Nanasaheb Dengle of Nimgaon that Sai Baba was a *chintamani* (a mythical jewel that gives whatever you wish). Dengle then went to Babul forest to meet Baba and bowed at his feet. Saint Anandnath (aged 95 years) of Yewala Math and a disciple of Akkalkot Swami once visited Shirdi and seeing Baba exclaimed, "This is a precious real diamond." Bidkar Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot met Sai Baba in 1873. Later in 1885 another disciple Anandanath Maharaj met Sai Baba and told villagers that Baba was like a genuine diamond lying in a dung heap.

After Baba shifted to the mosque (Dwarkamai) he was a little more regular in his habits. Villagers used to consider Baba as a mad *fakir* but go to him anyway for medicines. Initially he used to give herbal medicines but later he began to give only the ash (*udi*) from the *dhuni* (continuous fire) maintained in Dawarkamai.

By 1878 Mhalsapati the priest of the Khandoba temple, Appa Kulkarni, Jagle and Dengle, when they realised Baba had supernatural powers, became ardent devotees began to accept Sai Baba as their Guru. It is this trio that helped Baba settle in the mosque. Dengle used to move in Government circles and knew many Government officials.. Around 1881 Madhavrao Deshpande who used to be a teacher in the Shirdi primary school accepted Sai Baba as his Guru. Baba used to call him fondly as Shama and said that both of them had a relationship of many past births. At night Mhalsapati and Bayajabai's son Tatya used to sleep near him and used to have discussions on serious metaphysical topics.

In the end, only Mhalsapati and Shama survived Baba. By next year Chidambar Gadgil, the Mamlatdar was the first important official to consider Sai Baba as a man of knowledge and visited him

Somebody brought a bell and the custom of hailing the name of Shri Ram soon started. Baba used to sleep alternate nights at Dwarkamai and at a place called Chawdi where there used to be a program of singing *bhajans*.

Baba used to wear a white gown, but later, on request of Kashiram Shimpi he started wearing ochre and green coloured gown. In the early days he used to sit in trance under a *neem* tree, the place now known as Gurupadukasthan (place of Guru's *padukas*). He used to give spiritual advice to his devotees while sitting under this tree. The branch under which Baba used to sit has sweet leaves while other branches have bitter leaves.

Baba took bath by himself using extremely hot water which would have scalded any ordinary person. After bath he went out to beg for alms in five houses, always the same five houses. These were the houses of: Bayajabai Kote Patil, Patilbuwa Gondkar, Nandram Savairam, Appaji Kote and Narayan Teli. After that he went to a garden called Lendibag cultivated by himself where a leper by the name of Bhagoji used to escort him under an umbrella. He used to enter Lendibag and spend an hour or two alone. (On return from Lendibag there used to be afternoon Arati and thereafter lunch for all. Arati used to be attended by twenty to twenty-five persons. He also had a horse by name Shamsunder who used to stand steady during Arati and used to bend his front legs in obeisance at the end. Afternoon was crowded with devotees of all types, those in difficulties and coming for solace, those desiring material benefits and also those who wanted spiritual guidance.

By 1878-79 began to be recognized as a *jnani*, man of Knowledge. Mr Chidambar Gadgil, who was a Mamlatdar called on him recognizing him to be a *jnani*.





Satka and tumblers used by Sai Baba

Three day samadhi Towards end of 1885 Baba had a severe attack of asthma. He called Mhalsapati and told him that he was going into samadhi state for three days and was entrusting the body to him. He was to care of the body for three days. He then went into *nirvikalapa* samadhi. Mhalsapati sat on guard near the motionless body. Some people wanted to take the body for funeral rites thinking Baba had passed away but Mhalsapati stood firm and did not permit it. Baba came out of the samadhi three days later to everyone's relief. Mhalasapati was close to Baba who trusted him implicitly. Other persons close to Baba were Madhavrao Deshpande alias Shama, Bayajabai and Abdul.

6. ABDUL

In Nanded there used to be a fakir named Amiruddin. Abdul had set himself in his service since he was sixteen. In the year 1889, Baba appeared in Amiruddin's dream, put two mangoes in his hands and asked him to send Abdul to him. When Amiruddin woke up he really found two mangoes in his hands. He gave them to Abdul, and asked him to go to Shirdi and serve Sai Baba. Abdul came immediately to Shirdi. On seeing him, Baba said that his crow had come. Baba asked him to do his service with single minded. From

then onwards it was Abdul's task to keep the Dwarkamai and adjoining places clean. He also kept clean swept the paths on which Baba walked. He also cleaned the lamps in Dwarkamai and helped Baba in Lendi Bagh. Abdul washed Baba's clothes daily in the nearby stream and kept them neat.

In his leisure time he sat near Baba and read the Quran. He put two big pots of water near the Nanda Deep in Lendi Bagh. Baba set in the evenings daily at a fixed time near Nanda Deep. He took water in his hands from the pots and reading something sprinkled the water on all sides. After that he got up and looked seriously in all the directions in which water was sprinkled. People thought that this way Baba was protecting his devotees. Abdul survived Baba. His room next to Dwarkamai is still preserved.



Late Shri Abdul baba



Late Shri Mhalsapati



Late Shri Madhavrao Deshpande

Abdul used to write notes of his experiences. According to them Baba had profound knowledge of Quran as much as he had the knowledge of Bhagavad-Gita and other Hindu texts.

7. NANASAHEB CHANDORKAR

Narayan Govind alias Nanasaheb Chnadorkar was personal Assistant to the Collector of Ahmednagar in 1891 when he first met Baba. According to Baba his connection with Nanasaheb Chandorkar went back to many previous births. Baba always saw that such people with earlier connections came to him. These persons of course were not aware of their past connections with Baba. The way he made Nanasaheb Chandorkar do this is as follows.

One day in 1892 the village *munsif* Appa requested Baba's permission to leave Shirdi (nobody left Shirdi without Baba's permission) to go to Kopergaon to meet the Deputy Collector who was camping there. The name of the Deputy Collector was Nanasaheb Chandorkar. Baba told Appa to inform the Deputy Collector that Baba wanted him to come to Shirdi. Appa was surprised because it was unprecedented that a fakir from a small village asking the Deputy Collector to come to him.

With great hesitation Appa gave Baba's message to Nanasaheb Chandorkar. Nanasaheb Chandorkar ignored Baba's call twice or thrice. But after some days, he came to Shirdi. He had forgotten to bring an offering to Baba as is customary when one visits a saint or a deity. But he remembered he had a small packet of candy sugar and almonds kept in his pocket for emergency. He offered that to Baba who accepted it and distributed the contents to those present. Nanasaheb was surprised to note that that small packet sufficed for the two dozen persons gathered around Baba.

At the very first meeting with Baba, Nanasaheb felt that both of them knew each other from several births and felt very happy. The acquaintance with Baba slowly grew and Nanasaheb Chandorkar became a staunch devotee of Baba. Nanasaheb Chandorkar believed that Baba was the incarnation of God. Baba later told him that they had special relations which went back for four births and that Nana was his responsibility. Baba seemed to have such relationships in past lives with many people. He somehow managed to bring them to Shirdi and look after their welfare. In some cases he would instruct them through dreams. In some cases he would instruct persons in his entourage who knew such people to bring them to him. He told a devotee that their relationship went back to seventy-two lifetimes.

There is no written record of Baba's *leelas* (activities) prior to the visit of Nanasaheb Chandorkar. Having noticed this, Nanasaheb Chandorkar gave diaries to all close devotees of Baba with a request to record whenever and whatever they noticed about his greatness, his *leelas* and miracles. The compilation of Baba's life history became possible to only because of the foresight of Nanasaheb Chandorkar.

Baba went to any extent to help his devotees spiritually and materially too. But he tested them also to see that they remained righteous.

Once Nanasaheb agreed to give to the caretaker of the Dattatreya mandir on the Kopergaon-Shirdi route, three hundred rupees towards the cost of building a *ghat* (steps and landing platform to go to the river or lake shore). But he could not raise that amount and next time he visited Shirdi, took a circuitous route in order to avoid the caretaker but suffered a lot on the way. On reaching Shirdi he found Baba in a foul mood. Omniscient Baba reprimanded him for not only not keeping his promise to the caretaker but also for trying to avoid him instead of confessing that he could not collect the promised money.

Nanasaheb was very careful in his behaviour but he made a mistake once more. It happened like this. When Nanasaheb lived in Kalyan a beggar woman came to his home for alms. His wife gave her usual alms but the beggar woman demanded that she be given some *Bhajani* (flour of mixed roasted grains) which his wife had made that very day. That the beggar woman knew about *Bhajani* itself should have alerted the wife that she was no usual beggar. Not wishing to displease her she gave her a little *Bhajani*. But the beggar woman demanded more. She gave some more and again the woman demanded more. This made the wife very angry and she called her husband. He also got angry, called his office *chaprasi* (peon) and threw her out. Before leaving the woman remarked, "If you didn't want to give you could have said so but why do you have to call *chaprasi* to send me out? I shall go by myself".

After a few months when Nanasaheb went to Shirdi he again got a cold reception. When asked, Omniscient Baba told him he did not wish to speak to a person who breaks his word and again reprimanded him for calling a *chaprasi* to drive away the beggar woman instead of nicely telling her of his inability to give.

Baba often told the importance of Guru's place in the life of a disciple and how the disciple should consider his Guru as the Supreme Being.

The Jammer miracle as it is called occurred in 1904-05. It concerns Nanasaheb Chandorkar's pregnant daughter Mainatai at Jamner in Jalgaon and shows not only Baba's siddhis but extent to which Baba would go to protect his devotees.

At that time Nanasaheb Chandorkar was Mamlatdar at Jamner, in the Khandesh District, which is more than 100 miles away from Shirdi. Mainatai was about to deliver. Her case was very serious and she was suffering from labour pains for the last two or three days. Nanasaheb tried all remedies but in vain; he then remembered Baba and invoked His aid.

In Shirdi, one Ramgirbuva, whom Baba called Bapugirbuva, wanted at this time to go to his native place in Khandesh. Baba called him and told him to stop at Jamner on his way home and give the Udi and Arati to Nanasaheb. Ramgirbuva said that he had only two rupees with him and that amount was just sufficient for the railway fare up to Jalgaon and it was not possible for him to go from Jalgaon to Jamner, a distance

of about 30 miles. Baba said, “God will give." Then Baba asked Shama to write a well-known Arati composed by Madhav Adkar and give a copy of it with Udi to Ramgirbuva to be delivered to Nanasaheb.

That was Friday and he started at once. He reached Manmad at 7-30 p.m. and Jalgaon at 2-45 a.m. At that time plague regulations were enforced and he was wondering how to reach Jamner. To his great relief he heard somebody calling out "Who is Bapugirbuva of Shirdi?" It was a peon who was calling. He told him that he was Bapugirbuva. Then the peon said he was sent by Nanasaheb and took him out to an excellent Tonga (horsebuggy) with a good pair of horses. They both drove in it. The Tonga ran fast and early in the morning they came to a stream. The driver took the horses for watering them and the peon asked Ramgirbuva to partake of some eatables. On seeing the beard, moustache and the livery of the peon, Ramgirbuva suspected him to be a Moslem and was unwilling to take any refreshments from him, but the peon satisfied him by saying that he was a Hindu, a Kshatriya of Garhwal and that Nanasaheb had sent these refreshments and that there should be no objection to his eating them. After refreshments they started again. They reached Jamner at dawn. Ramgirbuva alighted to attend a call of nature. When he returned after a few minutes, there was no Tonga, no driver and no peon. He was dumbfounded. Then he went to the neighbouring house and made enquiries, he learnt that the Mamlatdar was at home. He went to Nanasaheb's house, announced himself and gave Baba's Udi and Arati to Nanasaheb. At this time, Mainatai's condition had become very serious and all were in deep anxiety. Nanasaheb called his wife and asked her to give the Udi, mixed with water for their daughter to drink and sing Baba's Arati. He realised Baba's help had come at the most crucial time. In a few minutes Mainatai delivered the child safely. When Ramgirbuva thanked Nanasaheb for the peon, Tonga and the refreshments etc., the latter was greatly surprised as he had not sent anybody to the station, and was not aware of any person coming from Shirdi.

Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar used to get transferred from place to place in the course of his duties. Once when he was the Mamlatdar at Nandurbar in Khandesh his devotion to Sai Baba bore fruit, as he got an order to go and stay at Pandharpur. Nanasaheb had to leave for Pandharpur immediately without even writing or informing anybody at Shirdi. But on the way he wanted to give a surprise visit to Shirdi and salute Baba before going to Pandharpur. Nobody dreamt of Nanasaheb’s departure for Shirdi, but Sai Baba knew all about this, as he was omniscient. At the time he reached Nimgaon, a few miles from Shirdi Baba was sitting and talking with Mhalsapati, Appa Shinde and Kashiram in Dwarkamai when he suddenly said, "Let us all four do some Bhajan, the doors of Pandhari are open." Then they began to sing in chorus, the meaning of the song being "I have to go to Pandharpur and I have to stay on there, for it is the house of my Lord."

Nobody believed that Baba knew Sanskrit. One day he surprised all by giving a good interpretation of a verse from the Gita to Nanasaheb Chandorkar and removed his pride.

8. MIRACLE OF THE LAMPS

Baba liked to illuminate the mosque with oil lamps. Baba used to visit the village shops for the oil and lighting many lamps with it sat on a stone nearby to watch the lights. But how long could they give the oil free? One day they united and decided not to give Baba oil free any more. When Baba came for oil they told they did not have oil. He returned without a word and sat in deep thought. Suddenly he got up, put wicks in the lamps, added water to the oil remaining in the oil container and drank the mixture. Then he added water to the container and poured it in the lamps and calmly lighted the lamps. The traders and other bystanders were watching this act of Baba. When they saw that the lamps were burning even with water they were surprised and bowed before Baba. They were now convinced that Baba was a great *Siddha* with divine powers. They surrendered to him. Baba reprimanded them for lying about their not having oil and said that they could have told that they were unable to give it free. From that day the devotees increased in number. This miracle happened in the year 1892.

In 1894 some fundamentalist Muslims who did not like worship of Baba in the mosque came in procession led by the Kazi of Sangamner but had to go back.

9. REGULAR WORSHIP AND ARATIS

From the year 1904, devotees started performing *aratis* three times a day in Dwarakamai. Nana Chandorkar had finalized the procedure and the songs to be sung during the aratis. For the afternoon *arati* all villagers assembled near Dwarakamai and sometimes Dwarakamai overflowed with the devotees. Even though thousands flocked there, Baba blessed them all. No true devotee ever left Shirdi empty-handed. Some devotees thought that since Baba had not seen them nor heard their problems, how could they get relief? Baba knew their doubts and announced publicly, "Oh my devotees! You will get rewarded for the devotion and confidence you reposed in me. *The moment you enter Shirdi village all your worries and difficulties will be over. Those who step into Dwarakamai, irrespective of their status, will get happiness. This 'mother' is very benevolent.*"

From 1909 onwards devotees treated Baba like a deity and began observing certain daily rituals common in worship of deities in temples. Seeing their love for him Baba had to reluctantly agree to all this. Whenever he slept in Chawdi they began Kakad Arati or early morning prayers using torch. (This is done symbolically to wake the deity who is treated as if it has all the attributes of a human being.) Then they took him in a procession to Dwarkamai where Baba used to sit on a stone. He then did his routine ablutions like cleaning the mouth, bath etc.



Late Shri Hari Sitaram Dixit



Late Shri nanasaheb Chandorkar



Late Shri Dasganu Maharaj

10. DASGANU MAHARAJ

His original name was Ganesh Dattatreya Sahasrabuddhe. He later became famous as Dasganu Maharaj and wrote biographies of many saints. He was with the police department which came under Nanasaheb Chandorkar who forced him to visit Shirdi many times at Baba's behest. His Guru Shri Vamanshastri Islampurkar had told him before taking *samadhi* to consider Shirdi Saibaba as his own form and that he would guide him. Dasganu came to Shirdi for the first time in 1896, was strongly attracted to Baba and became his ardent devotee.

Once, Dasganu came from Nevasa to Shirdi without taking official permission to leave his headquarters. Next day there was to be an inspection of his headquarters by the police chief therefore he wanted to hurry back. But Baba, instead of giving him permission insisted that he should not leave. Dasganu was extremely worried because his absence would have resulted in his dismissal but nobody dared disobey

Baba's instructions. About 3 AM in the morning Baba kicked him awake and shouting at him for sleeping asked him to leave immediately. Dasganu immediately left Shirdi as per Baba's instructions. It was night when he reached the dry basin of Pravara river where he encountered four persons whispering together under suspicious circumstances. Dasganu rushed forward with his pistol drawn in hand and ordered them to surrender. They were notorious robbers and were sharing the loot. Dasganu took them to the head-quarters where his chief had already left after passing adverse remarks on Dasganu. But everything changed for the better when his chief learnt that he had captured the four robbers. Thus Baba timed his departure well.

Dasganu left Government service in 1903 and as per Baba's instructions settled at Nanded. He started performing *kirtans* (discourses) and writing life histories of recent saints. The same year Dasganu's book 'Sant Kathamrit' was published. (Ch. 57 about Sai Baba's advice to Nanasaheb Chandorkar). Dasganu's *kirtans* on Baba's activities spread Baba's name far and wide. Dasganu's book 'Bhakta-Leelamrit' was published in 1906.

Ishavasya Upanishad and the Maidservant Dasganu once started to write a Marathi commentary on the Ishavasya Upanishad. Though he translated it in *ovi* style verse by verse, he himself did not understand the essence of the Upanishad. Dissatisfied, he consulted pundits who also could not satisfy him and finally he resolved to consult Sai Baba. In his next visit to Shirdi after prostrating before Baba he put forward his difficulties about the Ishavasya Upanishad. Sai Baba, blessed him and said, "You need not be anxious, there is no difficulty about the matter; the maid-servant of Kaka (Kakasaheb Dixit) will solve your doubts at Vileparle, on your way home". The people who were present then and heard this, thought that Baba was joking and said, "How could an illiterate maid-servant solve the difficulties of this nature", but Dasganu thought otherwise. He was sure that whatever Baba spoke must come true.

From Shirdi he went to Vileparle in Bombay and stayed with Kakasaheb Dixit. The next day morning he heard a girl singing in clear and melodious tones a beautiful song describing the beauty of a crimson coloured embroidered Sari with pretty borders. He came out and saw that it was the maidservant girl who was singing it while cleaning the utensils. The girl was happy oblivious of being dressed in rags. Dasganu felt pity for her and arranged through his host to give her a new Sari. The girl was very happy and came next day to work wearing that new Sari. That day also she played and danced with other girls in happy mood. But next day she was back dressed in her rags but she was as happy as the previous day. Now he realized that feelings of pain and pleasure depend upon the attitude of our mind. On thinking deeply over this incident, he realized that he had received a practical demonstration of the lesson of the Upanishad - the lesson of contentment with one's own lot in the belief that whatever happens, is ordained by God and is ultimately good for us.

11. RADHAKRISHNA MAI

A 25 year old widow, Mrs Sunderabai Kshirsagar, arrived in Shirdi in 1907. She came to be called Radhakrishna Mai. She was blessed by Baba who used to send a part of food collected as *Bhiksha* to her. One Balaji Patil Newaskar a great devotee of Baba used to keep clean all the passages and streets on which Baba walked daily. After Balaji's death this work was done by Radhakrishna Mai and after her by Abdul.

Ideal devotion This Balaji who was a farmer. He used to bring all his annual crop to Baba and took back only whatever Baba gave him for his family's sustenance during the year. This practice was continued by his son. One can only contrast this devotion with that of the devotees" who came (and come) to Baba only for their personal gains.

12. CELEBRATION OF RAMNAVMI AND 'URUS' AT SHIRDI

Mr. Gopalrao Gund a Revenue Inspector at Kopergaon was a great devotee of Baba by whose blessings he had got a son. He suggested the idea of celebrating a 'Urus' (fair) in the year 1897. Other Shirdi devotees Tatya Patil, Dada Kote Patil and Madhavrao Deshpande (Shama) approved of the idea and Baba's permis-

sion and blessings for the same were obtained. Their application to the Collector for permission to hold the Urus was first rejected on the recommendation of the village Kulkarni but was given later. Baba suggested that the Urus should be held on Ramnavmi day. Simultaneously the Muslim devotees started the Sandal Utsav. This idea of 'Sandal' procession originated with one Amir Shakkar Dalal, a Muslim devotee from Korhla. This procession is held in honour of great Muslim Saints. Sandalwood paste and scrapings are put in *thalis* (metal dishes) which are carried in procession through the village with incense burning before them and to the accompaniment of band and music. Then, after returning to the Masjid, the contents of the dishes are thrown by handfuls on the 'Nimbar' (niche) and walls of the Masjid. This work was managed by Amir Shakkar for the first three years and then afterwards by his wife. So on one day, the two processions, the 'Flags' by the Hindus and that of 'Sandal' by the Muslims, went on side by side, and are still going on without any hitch.

In combining the Urus and Ramnavmi it seems Baba had some end in view, in this, viz., the unification of the two festivals, the Urus and the Rama-Navami and the unification of the two communities - the Hindus and the Muslims. As future events showed, this object was achieved.

In 1912 A.D. a devotee Mr. Krishnarao Bhisma (the author of the pamphlet 'Sai Sagunopasana'), came for the fair with Dadasaheb Khaparde of Amravati. He suggested that Birth of Rama with traditional rituals also should be celebrated on the Urus day with kirtan, *prasad* etc. Since 1912, this festival began to grow in scale gradually year by year. From the 8th to 12th of Chaitra, Shirdi looked like a bee-hive of men. Shops began to be set up in increasing numbers. Wrestling bouts were also held.

Radha-Krishna Mai used to be a major support during these festivals. Her residence was full of guests on the occasion, and she had to look to their needs and also to arrange for all the paraphernalia of the fair. Feeding the poor, so dear to Sai Baba, was done on a grand scale in this fair. For this purpose, cooking on a grand scale and preparing various sweet dishes was done in Radha-Krishna Mai's home. The rich and wealthy devotees took a leading part in this programme. Another work, which she willingly did was to clean and white-wash the entire Masjid, its walls and floor, which were blackened and were full of soot on account of the ever-burning Dhuni (sacred fire). She did this work during the night when Sai Baba went to sleep every alternate day in the Chawdi. She had to take out everything, including the Dhuni and replace them after thorough cleaning and whitewashing. She worked hard during these festivals and that hard work and sincere efforts turned Shirdi into a Sansthan (State). Paraphernalia increased. Devotees presented a beautiful horse, a palanquin, chariot and many silver things, pots, buckets, pictures, mirrors etc. Elephants were also sent for the procession. Though the scale of celebrations with all the paraphernalia increased enormously, Baba ignored all these things and continued with his simplicity as before. It is to be noted that both Hindus and Muslims worked in unison in both the processions and during the entire festival there has been no hitch or quarrel between them so far. In the beginning about 5000-7000 people used to gather but in some years that figure went up to 75000. There has been no outbreak of any epidemic or any riots worth the name during past so many years.

13. CONSTRUCTION OF SATHE WADA

Rao Bahadur H. V. Sathe who was the Deputy Collector of Ahmednagar came to Shirdi in 1904. He had come for an official work to Kopargaon and having heard about Sai Baba's greatness he came to Shirdi. He became attracted to Baba who also took a great fondness to Sathe. Sathe became close with Baba but there was not much spiritual progress in him. The reason was that even with advancing age he could not control his lust. He used to visit a woman of ill repute in Shirdi. Sathe once went to see Baba before visiting her. On seeing him, Baba asked him whether he was on his way to the 'Shala' (the word natakshala is used in Marathi for a woman of ill repute). But Sathe, not aware of this nickname for the place, thought Baba was asking him about school (shala also means school) and gave some vague answer. Afterwards, he went to the house of the woman and sat in the outside verandah, indulging in some pleasant talks. After the pleasantries, when Sathe entered the house he was shocked to find Baba standing there staring at him with his sharp eyes, as if to caution Sathe. Baba also made some gestures with his hand which ap-

peared as though he was questioning him whether he had all the way come to Shirdi only to get ruined. He immediately turned back and came to the mosque. He fell at Baba's feet and took a vow not to visit that woman again during his life time. Then Baba blessed him with his raised hand. In this incident Baba did everything silently without uttering a word. Baba corrected the wrongs of his devotees in such a way that only those who committed them would understand without others knowing about them.

Sathe purchased a piece of land near Gurusthan in the year 1906 and constructed a Wada (A large house) in 1908. Naming it Sathe Wada it came to be used as a Dharmashala (resthouse) for devotees. It still stands with some changes. Baba regarded Sathe as his right hand in regard to all matters. Because Baba was keeping Sathe close to him and relying on him for everything the residents of Shirdi grew jealous towards him.

14. HOW DEVOTION DEVELOPS

While Baba lived many persons came to him for their problems and were satisfied but that is not surprising. What is remarkable is that many persons who did not believe in his divine qualities and considered all the miracles to be a fraud became his devotees as soon as they met him. All such stories would fill a book but the following typical story illustrates the point.

Mr. Laxman Nulkar, a subjudge at Pandharpur was a confirmed atheist while his friend Nanasaheb Chandorkar, the *mamlatdar* (administrator) at Pandharpur was an ardent devotee of Baba. He tried many times but without success to induce Nulkar to visit Shirdi to meet Baba but finally Nulkar agreed to accompany Chandorkar to Shirdi on the condition that he would visit Baba only in western style dress and would not bow before Baba. Also that he would come only as a tourist and only if he found a Brahmin cook before he left for Shirdi. Chandorkar smiled and agreed to these conditions. The same evening, a Brahmin came to Chandorkar for a cook's job and was sent to Nulkar thus satisfying the first condition. When the day of departure was fixed, Nulkar put one more condition that he should get the best quality Nagpur oranges for taking to Shirdi. Next day Nulkar found that somebody had kept a basket of hundred best quality Nagpur oranges in front of his door. Nobody could find out who kept them but the second condition was also fulfilled. Next day both friends left for Shirdi.

After reaching Shirdi Chandorkar was surprised to see that Nulkar had come to meet Baba in pure white Indian dress and not only that he prostrated before Baba who asked Chandorkar, "Who is this silly fellow you have brought with you?" Nulkar suspected that Baba knew about what he had said about him. When he told this to Chandorkar he consoled him telling him not get disturbed because Baba was an ocean of kindness. Next day Baba became wild on seeing Nulkar, abused him and said that it will be his "Satyanash" meaning destruction. Baba then held his head and hit it against a pillar. Everybody there quietly left. Chandorkar consoled Nulkar saying that Baba never does anything bad to anyone and he must have meant that not Nulkar but his sins will get destroyed. But Nulkar was worried.

That night Nulkar woke up suddenly at about two AM and developed a sudden craving for tobacco loaded betel leaf ("Pan"). He did not have any and he woke up Chandorkar who tried to convince him that in a village like that nobody was likely to give them Pan and tobacco at that hour. As Nulkar was pacing up and down the room somebody knocked on the door. Chandorkar opened the door to find a man from Dwarkamai who had come with four Pans saying that Baba had sent him because a devotee in that house was craving for it. He handed over the Pans to Chandorkar and left. Nulkar was watching all this with open mouth. Nulkar was no longer an atheist and became an ardent devotee of Baba.

In the image you worship Many visitors refused to bow to Baba or even to visit him for various reasons. Noolkar above was an atheist and did not like to visit. There was a doctor from Bombay who was a devotee of Shri Rama and would not bow to any other deity. A Ramdasi woman also got similar *darshan* of Shri Rama. Some were devotees of Dattatreya or Vithoba and insisted similarly. There were others who would bow only to their Guru. However in every case when they met Baba what they saw in Baba's place was their own deity or guru and then they became Baba's ardent devotees.

There are several incidents which go to prove Baba's oneness with other saints. Some typical incidents are:

(1) Muleshastri was a learned person in Shastras, the six *darshanas*, astrology and palmistry. He once came to Shirdi to meet Mr Gopalrao Buti am ardent devotee of Baba from Nagpur. Though he had intended to return to Nashik immediately, on the spur of the moment he accompanied others in the morning to see Baba. At that time Baba was distributing bananas as *prasad* to those present. Muleshastri had a hidden desire to see Baba's palm and extended his hand to hold Baba's hand. Baba ignored it and gave him four bananas. Silently Muleshastri returned to the Wada where he was staying and prepared to perform his daily *agnihotra* ritual. Here in Dwarkamai Baba set out for Lendibag and remarked "Take *geru* (ochre coloured clay used for paint) with you, I have to wear the ochre coloured robe today." By the time Baba returned to Dwarkamai afternoon *arati* was about to begin, Baba said, "Go to the newly arrived Brahmin and get *dakshina* from him. So Buti went to him and found him busy in *agnihotra*. But out of respect for Buti he left it unfinished and accompanied Buti to see Baba with *dakshina*. But being conscious of getting polluted by entering a *masjid* he made obeisance to Baba and offered flowers from a distance. Now Miuleshastri got a shock. While everyone else was seeing Baba sitting in Dwarkamai what Muleshastri was watching was his Guru Gholap in ochre coloured clothes. He ran up to the *masjid* and embraced the feet of his guru. After arati was over what Muleshastri saw was Baba asking for dakshina. Muleshastri prostrated before Baba.

(2) Shri Vamanshastri Islampurkar, guru of Dasganu Maharaj, had told his disciple before taking samadhi to consider Shirdi Saibaba as his own form and there was no difference between them and that Baba would guide him from time to time in future.

(3) A rich and religious Parsi gentleman named Ratanshi from Nanded once decided to visit Baba with the desire of getting a son. Before leaving for Shirdi he gave a small party to the local Muslim saint Moulavi Jamalsaheb. That cost him three rupees and fourteen *annas*. When he visited Baba in Shirdi and put his hand in the pocket to make an offering of money, Baba said, "From the offering you are going to make deduct three rupees and fourteen annas and give the rest. I have already received three rupees and fourteen *annas* from you." It was much later that a puzzled Ratanshi with the help from Dasganu Maharaj related the two incidents.

(4) One Mr Pitale from Bombay came to Shirdi and bowed with folded hands before Baba. Baba took three rupees from his gown (*kafni*) pocket and said, "Bapu, I had given you earlier two rupees. Now add these three to those and worship them daily". Pitale was surprised because he had never met Baba earlier. However on his return to Bombay his mother remembered that his father had once visited Akkalkot to meet Swami Samarth and Swami had given him two rupees with instructions to worship them daily. After his father's death the daily *puja* had stopped and the two rupees had been lost hence Pitale was not aware of it

(5) There was a person from Goa who had taken a vow that if he got a job he would offer first month's salary to Lord Dattatreya. He did get a job for Rs 15 a month but forgot to complete his vow. When he visited Shirdi after many years (his salary had increased to Rs 700), Baba asked him for Rs 15 and told him that he had completed his vow to Lord Dattatreya.

(6) Shri Vasudevananada Saraswati (Tembeswami) was camping at Rajamahendri (Andhra Pradesh) on the banks of Godavari. Mr. Pundalikrao, a pleader from Nanded (at that time in Nizam State) went to see him with some friends. While they were talking with him, the names of Shirdi and Sai Baba were casually mentioned. Hearing Baba's name, the Swami bowed with his hands; and taking a coconut gave it to Pundalikrao, and said to him, "Offer this to my brother Sai, with my *pranam* and request him not to forget me, but ever love me." He also added that the Swamis do not generally bow to others, but in this case an exception had to be made. Mr. Pundalikrao consented to take the fruit and his message to Baba.

15. MRS. RADHABAI DESHMUKH

There was an old woman by name Radhabai, mother of one Khashaba Deshmukh. Hearing Baba's fame, she came to Shirdi with the people of Sangamner and after Baba's darshan resolved in her mind, that she should accept Baba as her Guru, and take mantra from Him. But Baba never gave any such mantra so she decided to fast herself unto death until Baba accepted her as disciple and gave her Mantra. She stayed in her lodging and fasted without even water for three days. Shama (Madhavrao Deshpande) noticed this and reported the matter to Baba interceding on her behalf. Baba sent for her, asked why she was putting herself to such torture and told her his own story concerning his guru. He said, "Oh mother, why are you subjecting yourself to unnecessary tortures and hastening your death? You are really My Mother and I am your child. I tell you my own story. I had a Guru. He was a great Saint and most merciful. I served him long, very long; still he would not blow any Mantra into my ears. I had a keen desire, never to leave him but to stay with and serve him; and at all costs receive some instructions from him. But he had his own way. He first got my head shaved and asked me two *pice* as Dakshina (1 *pice* was one sixty-fourth of a Rupee.). I gave the same at once. But these two *pice* were not coins. They were: (1) Firm Faith and (2) Patience or perseverance. I gave these two *pice* or things to him, and he was pleased. I resorted to My Guru for 12 years. He brought me up. He was my sole refuge. My mind was always fixed on him. This was Nishtha or Shraddha which is one *pice* of the Dakshina. Saburi (Patience or perseverance) is the other pice. I waited patiently and very long on my Guru and served him. This Saburi will ferry you across the sea of this mundane existence. Saburi is manliness in man, it removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways, and casts aside all fear, and ultimately gives you success. Saburi is the mine of virtues, consort of good thought. Nishtha (Faith) and Saburi (Patience) are like twin sisters, loving each other very intimately. "My Guru never expected any other thing from Me. Oh mother, my Guru never taught me any Mantra, then how shall I blow any Mantra in your ears? Just remember that Guru's tortoise-like loving glance gives us happiness. Do not try to get Mantra or Upadesh from anybody. Make me the sole object of your thoughts and actions; and you will, no doubt, attain Paramartha (the spiritual goal of life the truth. No Sadhanas, nor proficiency in the six Shastras, are necessary. Have faith and confidence in your Guru. Believe fully, that Guru is the sole Actor or Doer. Blessed is he who knows the greatness of his Guru and thinks him to be Hari, Hara and Brahma (Trimurti) Incarnate." Instructed in this way, the old lady was convinced; she bowed to Baba and gave up her fast.

16. BADE BABA

Bade Baba the Muslim fakir in Aurangabad whom Sai Baba trained for twelve years came to Shirdi permanently in 1909. This Bade Baba was much respected by Sai Baba. He always sat on the right hand of Sai Baba. After the chilim (pipe) was first smoked by him, it was then offered to Baba and others. After the dishes were served, at the time of taking meals at noon, Baba respectfully called Bade Baba and made him sit on His left side, and then all partook of food. Baba paid him also daily Rs.50/- out of the amount collected as Dakshina. Baba accompanied him hundred paces whenever he was going away. Such was his position with Baba.

While a second cholera epidemic was around, somebody brought an old goat to the Masjid . It was weak, and about to die. Baba asked Bade Baba who was nearby to behead it with one stroke and offer it as sacrifice. But he flatly refused, saying why it should be killed for no reason. Then Baba asked Shama to kill it. He went to Radha-Krishna-Mai and brought a knife from her and placed it before Baba. Knowing the purpose for which the knife was taken, she took it back. Then Shama went to bring another knife, but stayed in the Wada, and did not return immediately. Then Baba asked Kakasaheb Dixit to do the job. Kakasaheb went to Sathe Wada and returned with a knife. He was ready to kill it at Baba's bidding even though he was a Brahmin who never in his life knew killing. All the people wondered to see that Bade Baba, a Muslim was unwilling to kill it while this pure Brahmin was making preparations to do so. He tightened his *dhoti* dress and with a semicircular motion raised his hand with the knife and looked at Baba for the final signal. Baba said - "What are you waiting for? Strike!" Then, when the hand was just about to

come down, Baba said - "Stop, how cruel you are! Being a Brahmin, you are killing a goat?" Kakasaheb obeyed and kept the knife down and said to Baba, "Your nectar like word is law to me, I do not know any other ordinance. I remember you always, meditate on your form and obey you always without bothering whether it is right or wrong. Prompt compliance with Guru's orders is our duty and dharma". Then Baba said to Kakaseheb, that he would Himself do the offering and killing business. It was settled that the goat should be disposed of near a place called Takkya, where fakirs used to sit. When the goat was being removed to that place, it fell dead on the way.

Hemadpant closes the account with a classification of disciples. (1) First or best (2) Second or middling and (3) Third or ordinary. The best kind of disciples are those who guess what their Gurus want and immediately carry it out and serve them without waiting for an order from them. The average disciples are those who carry out the orders of their Masters to a letter, without any delay, and the third kind of disciples are those, who go on postponing the carrying out of their orders and making mistakes at every step. The disciples should have firm faith, backed up by intelligence and if they have patience to these, their spiritual goal will not be distant. Difficult practices like *pranayama* or Hathayoga are not at all necessary. When the disciples get the above-mentioned qualities, they become ready for further instructions and the Masters then appear and lead them on, in their spiritual path to perfection.

17. DADASAHEB KHAPARDE

Dadasaheb Khaparde of Amravati, Member of the Central Legislative assembly and author of Shirdi Diary visited Shirdi in 1910. In 1911 when Khaparde family was living in Shirdi one day their son got high fever which further developed into Bubonic plague. A frightened Mrs. Khaparde thought of leaving Shirdi and went to Baba for permission. She met him as he was coming near the Buti Wada during his evening rounds. She informed him about his son having plague. Baba consoled her and reassured her that the difficulty will pass. He then lifted up his gown and showed to all present, four fully developed bubos, as big as eggs, and added, "See, how I have to suffer for my devotees; their difficulties are mine." Seeing this unique and extraordinary deed, the people were convinced about how the Saints suffer for their devotees. How their mind is soft and kind and how they love their devotees without any idea of personal gains regarding them as their own kin.

18. GOPALRAO BUTI

Gopalrao Buti, a barrister from Nagpur was a disciple of Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon. Having been attracted to Baba he made Shirdi his home since 1910. Once he had a severe attack of diarrhea and vomiting which no medicine could cure. He went to Baba who made him sit, raised his finger and ordered not to go for evacuation of bowels or to vomit. Both the afflictions stopped immediately. Another time Buti was asked to drink *kheer* as medicine for cholera, which also worked.

One day, while Buti was sleeping he had a dream in which Baba directed Buti to build a *wada* along with a temple. Buti woke up to find Shama who was sleeping in an adjoining room crying in his sleep. When asked Shama replied that he had a dream in which Baba said let there be a *wada* with a temple so that he could satisfy the needs of all. They Buti decided to build the *wada* for which he along with Shama and Kakasaheb Dikshit met Baba and obtained his permission.

Construction started and then Buti had an inner urge to build a temple on the ground floor where he would install an idol of Murlidhar in the *sanctum sanctorum*. Baba consented but remarked, “When the temple is built we shall inhabit it and ever afterwards live in joy.” A platform for the idol was made and an order for the idol was also placed.

As it turned out Sai Baba fell ill immediately afterwards and it was his body and not the Murlidhar idol that was installed there.

19. MR. DABHOLKAR (HEMADPANT)

Mr. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar or Hemadpant came to see Baba in 1910 through the grace of Nana Chandorkar. He was present when the episode of Baba grinding wheat himself and asking it to be thrown along village boundaries occurred. When he was grinding four women came to help him. But after the grinding was over they divided the flour into four parts to take with them. Baba became angry with tem and the women felt ashamed. But Baba asked them to go and sprinkle the flour along village boundaries. Hemadpant later was told that Baba had done this to keep cholera epidemic out of Shirdi. It was later found from records that while cholera had taken lives elsewhere there were none in Shirdi.

Hemadpant wanted to write a book describing the activities and miracles of Baba. Baba asked him to wait for some time. In 1917 he again approached Baba through Shama for permission to write the book. Baba blessed him and gave permission. Thus Sai Satcharitra in Marathi was written.

After retirement from Govt. service Hemadpant found it difficult to make two ends meet on a meagre pension. But Baba saw to it that he had alternate jobs to make up the deficit.

20. LAXMIBAI SHINDE

Laxmibai Shinde was a good and well-to-do woman. She used to work in the Masjid day and night. Except Mhalasapati, Tatya and Laxmibai, none was allowed to step in the Masjid at night. Once while Baba was sitting in the Masjid with Tatya in the evening, Laxmibai came and saluted Baba. The latter said to her – “Oh Laxmi, I am very hungry." She immediately left saying – “Baba, wait a bit, I am coming immediately with *Bhakri*." She returned soon with *Bhakri* and vegetables and placed them before Baba. But instead of eating it himself he gave it to a dog. Laxmibai then asked – “What is this, Baba, I hurried home, prepared *Bhakri* with my own hands for you and you are giving it to a dog without eating it yourself? You trouble unnecessarily." Baba replied – “Why are you unhappy? If the dog’s hunger is satisfied then so is mine. The dog has got a soul; the creatures may be different, but the hunger of all is the same, though some speak and others are dumb. Understand for certain, that he who feeds the hungry, really serves me with food. Regard this as an absolute Truth." This is an ordinary incident but Baba thereby propounded a great spiritual truth and showed its practical application in daily life without hurting anybody's feelings. From this time onward Laxmibai began to offer Him daily Bhakri and milk with love and devotion. Baba accepted and ate it lovingly. He took a part of this and sent the remainder with Laxmibai to Radha-Krishna-Mai who always relished and ate Baba's remnant *prasad*. This Bhakri story shows how Sai Baba pervaded all the creatures and transcended them.

21. DEVOTEES FROM EVERYWHERE

Baba never claimed himself to be a Guru but he was always surrounded by innumerable devotees of all castes, creeds and religions, including educated people like doctors, pleaders, government officials etc. from cities as well as illiterate villagers irrespective of whether they were rich or poor. In the beginning Baba did not ask for *dakshina* but later he began to ask for it and at the end of the day distribute it around. Baba knew what was in everyone’s pocket so nobody could say he did not have the money or whatever Baba asked. Often the person himself did not know that he was carrying the very item Baba was asking him for and was surprised when he found it. Baba’s grace extended even to animals some of whom, Baba informed, were men with bad *karmas* reborn as animals.

His devotees belonged to all religions, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Parsees as well as Christians. Political celebrities like Lokamanya Tilak (1917) and Dadasaheb Khaparde (1910), saints like Bidkar Maharaj, famous actors like Ganpatrao Bodas and even senior British officials like Commissioner of Central Provinces Sir George and Lady Curtis and Collector of Nagar district Mr. Macaulay visited him. Baba had the power to read what was going on in people's minds even when they were in faraway places and used to talk to them giving them solace. He always said "Allah Malik Hai" i.e. God is the master, "Alla Tera Bhala Karega" i.e. God will bless you but he never claimed himself to be God. Baba did not preach but managed in various ways proper lesson to be imparted to the person concerned. We have already seen how Dasganu was

taught the meaning of Ishavasyopnishad. Two mottos from Baba's teachings are Shraddha (Faith) and Saburi (Patience). Another remarkable thing about Baba was that ardent prayers for help reached him


Late shri Annasaheb Dabholkar


Late Smt. Bayajabai Kote Patil


Late Smt.Laxmibai Shinde

even from a distance and he helped. Baba cured people of their diseases and material problems as well. People found that his instructions, however strange or ill advised they may appear, should be obeyed otherwise they suffered losses.

Only a few incidents from Baba's life are given in the above. It would be impossible to give details of every incidence which even Sai Satcharitra could not fully cover.

22. EVENTS PRELIMINARY TO SAMADHI

Baba knew about his own as well as others' past births, so he must have known about the present lifetime also especially when his own *mahasamadhi* would be. According to Kamath and Kher (See Bibliography), Baba, four months earlier to *mahasamdhi*, called Bade Baba's son Kasim. Giving him Rs 250 he sent him to Aurangabad to see Fakir Shamsuddin Mian with a message to arrange for "*Nat*" i.e., singing the Prophet's praise, *qawali* (Muslim *Bhajans* to the accompaniment of drum and clapping) and *langar* (feeding people). He also gave him a garland of *sevanti* flowers (*chrysanthamums*) to be given to Fakir Banne Mia with the message: "*Nou din, nou tarikh, Allah Mia apne dhunia le jayega. Marji Allahki."* Baba asked Imam Chhota Khan to accompany him. They left Shirdi and reached Aurangabad railway station at 3 PM. Fakir Shamsuddin Mian had come to the station to receive them. He asked Imam Chhota Khan whom he knew, who the guests were that had come from Fakir Sai and repeated Baba's instructions to him word for word.

Next day, Kasim and Imam went to Banne Mia's house. He was standing with one arm raised in the air. The Arabs standing around him warned them not to disturb him lest they were beaten by him. An hour later Imam took courage and put the garland given by Baba in Banne Mia's neck. Banne Mia lowered his arm and the Imam gave him Baba's message. Fakir Banne Mia gazed at the sky and tears began to flow from his eyes. Baba passed away four months later. These actions of Sai Baba confirm his Sufi connections.

Fourteen days earlier to his passing away Baba made Vaze, a devotee, to sit in the Masjid and read the book Ramvijaya and sat listening. Vaze took eight days for the first reading took, three days for the second and during the third reading Vaze became tired and Baba made him stop and sent him away.

Two years earlier one Ramchandra Patil who was very ill was praying to Baba. Baba had told him in a vision that he himself need not worry but Tatya Kote's days were numbered and that in 1918 Tatya would die on Vijayadashmi day. Tatya was Bayajabai's son. Though Baba asked Patil to keep this a secret he was very disturbed and told the prediction to Bala Shimpi.

There were other signs too. A few days earlier the brick mentioned earlier fell and broke due to the negligence of a devotee. When Baba came to know about it he said, "It is not the brick which has broken but it my life which has been smashed. That brick was my companion for life. Now I am not going to live much longer." And soon after that Baba started getting fever.

23. THE DAY OF SAMADHI

True to Baba's word told to Ramachandra Patil, Tatya fell sick in September 1918 and was bed-ridden. He could not come for Baba's *darshan*. Baba was also down with fever. Tatya had full faith in Baba and Baba in God. Tatya's illness worsened and he could not move at all but always remembered Baba. The predicament of Baba began to grow equally worse. The day predicted, i.e. Vijayadashami was approaching and both Ramachandra Patil and Bala Shimpi were terribly frightened about Tatya because Baba's words could not be false. On Vijayadashami day which was Tuesday, the 15th October 1918 Tatya's pulse became very slow and he was expected to pass away any moment. But a curious thing happened. Tatya remained, his death was averted and in his stead Baba left his mortal coil at about 2-35 p.m. It seemed as if there was an exchange. People said that Baba gave up his life for Tatya. Only Baba can tell why he did so. It seems, however, that Baba hinted about his own departure, substituting Tatya's name for His.

On the day of his samadhi Baba sent home all the people who normally used to eat with him in the Mosque. Then he gave Laxmibai five rupees first and then four more rupees. Shyama alias Madhavrao Deshpande was sitting on the steps of Dwarkamai to whom he told in a weak voice to take him to the stone house of Mr. Buti. And those were the last words uttered by him. He kept his head on the lap of his devotee Bayajiappa Kote Patil and in that sitting position breathed his last.

There was a big gathering of his devotees and there were arguments about the relics. Muslims wanted to build a *Darga* while Hindus wanted to build his Samadhi in the house of Mr Buti as per the last words. Finally, the Mamlatdar of Kopergaon took a vote and decided to build the samadhi in Buti's house which was done thirty-six hours after his death. But during this period Baba's body did not lose its brightness.

Today Shirdi has become a place of pilgrimage where thousands flock to pray to Baba and take part in the daily rituals. His temples are being established in many countries. Baba is more like a God than a spiritual human being. There are many temples in many towns and cities devoted to him. Besides the organisation which manages the Shirdi Establishment many other institutions have been established that sponsor temples as well as social services to the public. One such organisation is Shri Sai Baba (Shirdi) Mission International based in UK which has a plan of installing 110 silver Padukas at various locations round the world of which more than a dozen have already been installed, some of them in Europe.

24. BABA'S ELEVEN SAYINGS

1. No harm shall befall him who sets his foot on the soil of Shirdi.
2. He who cometh to My Samadhi, his sorrow and suffering shall cease.
3. Though I be no more in flesh and blood, I shall ever protect my devotees.
4. Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered.
5. Know that my Spirit is immortal. Know this for yourself.
6. Show unto me he who sought refuge and been turned away.
7. In whatever faith men worship me, even so do I render to them.
8. Not in vain is my Promise that I shall ever lighten your burden.
9. Knock, and the door shall open. Ask and ye shall be granted.

10. To him who surrenders unto me totally I shall be ever indebted.
11. Blessed is he who has become one with me.

25. BABA'S ELEVEN ASSURANCES

1. Whosoever puts their feet on Shirdi soil, their sufferings will come to an end.
2. The wretched and miserable will rise to joy and happiness as soon as they climb the steps of the mosque.
3. I shall be ever active and vigorous even after leaving this earthly body.
4. My tomb shall bless and speak to the needs of my devotees.
5. I shall be active and vigorous even from my tomb.
6. My mortal remains will speak from my tomb.
7. I am ever living to help and guide all who come to me, who surrender to me and who seek refuge in me.
8. If you look to me, I look to you.
9. If you cast your burden on me, I shall surely bear it.
10. If you seek my advice and help, it shall be given to you at once.
11. There shall be no want in the house of my devotee.

Now we close this series on Datta-devotees by saying Jai Gurudevadatta.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.

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The photographs of Sai devotees are from an email communication dtd November 2, 2008 from a Sai-devotee Mr Rohit Behal. I am grateful to him.

PART II

FAMOUS DEVOTEES OF DATTATREYA TRADITION

1. .INTRODUCTION

The devotees of Shri Dattatreya we read about so far (Except for Shri Sai Baba) were all disciples of the avatars of Shri Dattatreya. In the historical past many Datta-devotees were initiated directly by Shri Dattatreya or by other Datta-devotees who had reached perfection.

The information has been drawn from various sources, principally *Shri Dattatreya Dnyanakosha* by Dr. P. N. Joshi (in Marathi), the various issues of the magazine Santakripa and other publications of Santakripa Pratishthan Pune and the annual magazine Swamikripa published at the time of Deepavali.

About Biographies of Saints A biography is in essence a history. Two kinds of authors write biographies of saints. Those who are basically historians who collect written records or reports of life events like birth, education, marriage, spiritual training etc. of the subject and sifting credible and qualify the text material according to its credibility. Then there are the devotees of the subject who wish to present their Guru in the best possible light without bothering about the credibility of reported events. There is also a third kind who has very little historical material to use and laces his text with numerous quotations from the works of other saint authors like Tukaram, Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo and Samarth Ramdas not to mention the Puranas making a show of his being a learned person. But we ignore here this latter type and discuss the biographies authored by the first two types of authors.

Except for autobiographies and the biography of Sai Baba of Shirdi (Sai Satcharitra), almost all biographies are written much after the death or samadhi of the saint. If the saint is a householder then some reliable information about his birth, childhood, adult and spiritual life may be collected within a reasonable time otherwise one has to rely on the hearsay information from whoever who might have come in contact with the saint. If the saint happens to be a *sanyasi* then unless he became a *sanyasi* in a very old age, the saint's past gets erased in the process of the ritual that transforms him into a sanyasi, because the ritual involves a formal death ceremony and a new name and forgetting the past life. The information has to be collected from tidbits the saint might have given away or mentioned by some contemporary writer. Only when the saint becomes famous then people remember his activities, especially the miracles.

A historian writing a biography would have a discriminating matter-of-fact approach in his presentation of biographical information but a devotee author is driven by his deep devotion to present the personality and activities of their Guru in special light and in a superlative style adding all sorts of miracles from pre-birth to the post-death events concerning his Guru. The biography is most likely to give great details about how the birth was foretold through mother's dreams, her cravings during pregnancy, auspicious natural phenomena like bright skylights, miracles performed by the child in childhood and so on as if somebody had carefully kept a record.

Consider the biography Gautam Buddha for example. His mother is said to have a dream of a white elephant with six tusks ten months before Buddha's birth in a garden in Lumbini beneath a *Sal* tree but his mother died either during childbirth or a week later. Thus all the stories of the supernatural can only be myths created by the devotees. Buddha's enlightenment came at the advanced age of 35 years and recognition as divinity still later after which stories of his miracles multiplied. (Ref: *Gautama Buddha, Wikipedia article*). One will notice the same about most biographies of saints.

Some common miracles The devotee author often tend to stress on the miracles done by their Guru and in this process they even ascribe to him sometimes the miracles done by other saints, to boost the Guru's image. We often note that the many miracles claimed to have been performed are common to a number of saints. For example feeding a large number of people on a small quantity of food seems to have been

ascribed to almost every saint. Making a barren cow or buffalo give milk is also common (e.g. Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth, and Shri Shankar Maharaj). Reviving a dead person is also common (Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth, and Dnyaneshwar Maharaj). The theme of remembering one's previous lives as he crosses a set of lines drawn on the ground occurs in Gurucharitra as well as in the biography of Samarth Ramdas. So is the story of Shri Dattatreya appearing as a Muslim *Malang* (fakir) before Janardanswami and Eknath common to Samarth Ramdas also. Thus there is no way of confirming the stories of events in a saint's life and one has to accept them at their face value.

Here I may quote (translated from Marathi) Mr. Vasudeo Savaikar in his forward to the biography of Shri Jairamswami Vadgaonkar by Vaman D. Deshpande Nazrekar, published by Santakripa Pratishthan. He says,

> "Historically authentic information about the lives of the saints of earlier era, their spiritual, social work and their writings is generally not available. Whatever is available in various compositions and historical records contain only the stories of their miracles. Also, the same stories of the miracles are told by their devotees changing only the saint's name. In these stories also so much exaggeration is made that the truth is eclipsed."

Reader will notice the truth of this while reading even these brief biographies given here though efforts have been made to avoid this as far as possible.

It is a different case when one looks at the information given in the **autobiographies** of the saints. I have come across five such autobiographical writings. These are (1) the autobiography of Purohitswami (An Indian Monk by Purohitswami with a Forward by W.B.Yeats, Marathi translation by his daughter Mrs. Mrinalini Chitale); this has been used later; (2) Autobiography of a Yogi by Swami Paramhansa Yogananda; (3) The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi by Swami Kriyanand (Donald Walters, Disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda); (4) Living with the Himalayan Masters by Swami Rama, and (5) True Experiences by Swami Krishnanand. The information in these books comes directly from personal experiences and has to be believed. Besides, the modesty of the saints precludes exaggeration. In the present context only the autobiography of Purohitswami is relevant to us since he is the only saint out of the above who was a Dattatreya devotee.

There are some parameters common to many Datta-devotees. Most of them seem to have been born with a spiritual base and in religious families, no doubt due to their *sadhana* (spiritual practice) of earlier births. As Shri Krishna tells Arjuna in the sixth chapter of Dnyaneshwari,

> "Arjuna, can there be anything other than liberation for one who longs for it? He (a yogi who dies prematurely) is merely taking rest for some time. ….. But liberation is reserved for him. ….. Then he returns to the earth to be born in a religious family and starts gaining spiritual wealth. People in such family observe morals, speak clearly and truthfully and behave as prescribed in the Scriptures. For them, the Vedas are the living deity, actions are guided by *Swadharma* and discrimination, thoughts are only about God and the family deity is their wealth. Thus the person happily is born here on the strength of his meritorious deeds. Or he is reborn into the family of a yogi of high level. The person even as a child is already loaded with knowledge because of his past. Due to the mature intellect he knows all branches of knowledge easily. His intellect develops further from the point of his death in the earlier lifetime and he is able to grasp mysterious subjects and even difficult things told by a Guru. His sense-organs come under his control, mind becomes one with the *Prana* the vital life-breath and the *Prana* dissolves in the Consciousness. Somehow, yoga practice also comes easily to him and he can attain the *Samadhi State* effortlessly. He attains *Siddhis* even while he is an acolyte. He is able to do his spiritual exercises effortlessly because he has reached the shores of the Self-

realization after millions of years and after overcoming the impediments of thousands of births. He gets the power of discrimination and putting that also behind in time and going beyond thought he becomes one with the Brahman. (6:437-467)

Thus the reader will notice that not only do these men attain high spiritual levels but their trend can be noticed in childhood itself. Many are able to predict the future and able to perform miracles, but that depends upon the person's spiritual level of earlier birth. The strength of this argument may be confirmed from the autobiographies of saints and yogis presented below.

In some biographies the main character is presented as an avatar by the devotee author. This is in keeping with his reverence to his Guru. One notices this trend of assigning title of an avatar to prominent personalities in many Indian religious writings especially the Puranas. For example Kapilmuni, proponent of the Sankhya philosophy is presented as an avatar of Vishnu and Adi Shankaracharya as an avatar of Shiva. This gives a divine backing to their writings and philosophy which the pious dare not contest. The pious do not ask why, if the particular sage was an avatar and his writings were divine, they are not accepted as absolute truth by all and why there are a variety of philosophies and dogmas on spiritual matters?

Only thing we can accept probably is that while the Ultimate Principle or Brahman at the root of this material universe is one, it is manifested to the material world through various deities. In some religions the deity may be considered as a messenger or son of God. In Hindu system there are various deities or powers which are manifestation of different combinations in various proportions of the *Sattva-Raja-Tama* attributes and each sect, family or person reveres some particular deity with the help of which persons reach higher spiritual levels.

Thus we see that when persons are reborn they are reborn with a background of devotion to Shiva or Vishnu or to the Goddess or to Ganesh or their accredited avatars like Shri Rama, Shri Krishna or in our case Shri Dattatreya. Each deity is like your father and mother whose hand you hold to travel along the spiritual path. The philosophical writings (like Gita and Dnyaneshwari or treatises on Adwaita, Dwaita, Vishishtadwaita or other philosophies); devotional writings (like Gurucharitra, Bhagwat Purana, and Devi Saptashati etc.) are devices which help the seeker to ascend the spiritual path by facilitating detachment towards worldly matters and turning his mind towards God.

Many seekers who read biographies of such great persons feel dejected when they read of their fast progress, getting a Guru or a vision of some deity in a short time. They compare themselves with these saints and feel they are not achieving anything from their own *sadhana.* But they forget the important thing that *sadhana* is not a matter of a single lifetime but many; and in every birth one rises up a little, depending upon how one has used his opportunities in the current life time offered by the past good karmas and the ultimate balance sheet of his *sadhana*. Comparing oneself with great masters is improper and can only lead to misery. The biographies are examples before a seeker who should note the character, depth of faith and devotion and the arduous efforts of the subject to meet God.

Attempt has been made to make the present the biographies in chronological order. Except for Gorakshanath I have not included saints belonging to Nath Sect like Shri Gajananmaharaj Gupte or Swami Swarupanand.

2. CASTE AND RELIGION FACTOR

In spite of Dattatreya being a balance of attributes we note in Dattatreya tradition two distinct streams as regards caste and religion. The orthodox claim that Dattatreya's avatar was to preserve the *varnashramdharma* or the code of behaviour according to caste. We have noted that while Narasimha Saraswati in accordance with his times did maintain the *varnashramdharma* but his devotes and disciples were in all castes. Though he asked his disciples to stay away from serving Muslims he himself blessed the Muslim

king, both policies probably to save the Hindus from the interference from the Muslim rulers. On the other hand we see Swami Samarth totally against *varnashramdharma.* He tried to instill this approach in his disciples as would be clear from his biography in Parts III and IV. But we also saw that the orthodoxy has penetrated so deep into the Hindu mind that his disciples like Vamanbuva ignored his teachings and preached orthodoxy. As mentioned in an earlier part Vamanbuva insisted that Guru should not be of another caste and should be learned in the Vedas etc., generally implying that he should be a Brahmin. But we have the case of saint Tukaram who had a Brahmin disciple and Dnyaneshwar Maharaj who was outside the caste system had also Brahmin disciples. The Orthodox claim that caste system has sanction of the Vedas on the basis of *Purushasukta* in which various castes are said to have arisen from various parts of the body of Purusha. First of all *Purushsukta* is a very late addition to the Rig-Veda. In the early Vedic days a person born of a father of one *Varna* could practice another because the system was not birth based. Many Kshatriya princes became rishis (Shantanu's brother Devapi for example) and many Brahmins, Parashurama for example in reality were Kshatriyas. Manu Savarni who was contemporary of rishi Gritsamada and Ushanas Shukracharya was a commoner who became a rishi.

Historians are of the opinion that while Brahmins where busy refining the Yajna techniques and make them more elaborate, those who retired to forests for meditation and the *kshatriya* kings like King Pravahana Jaibali of Panchala tribe and King Ashwapati of Kekaya tribe realized and contributed to the concept of the unique principle Brahman. It was King Janak to whom even Rishis went for learning about Brahman. (See "Aspirations from a new world" by Shakuntala Rao Shastri pub. by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).

It is true that among the saints a large number are Brahmins but for ages the education, especially religious education was confined mostly to the Brahmins but there is reason for this. Upper caste children generally have a strict educational upbringing, religious routine and are exposed to pious and ritualistic surroundings right from birth, making them more capable of withstanding the rigours of the spiritual pursuit, but it does not make the spiritual field proprietary to them. However it develops in them an internal strength which makes them to be respected and even feared. We see this strength in the character of saints like Chidambar Dikshit, Vasudevananda Saraswati etc. (see later).

At the same time some greatest yogis were non-Brahmins. Jalandharnath the Nath yogi contemporary of Gorakshanath was actually a person of untouchable caste. In fact Nath Sect does not bother about caste and religion and in Datta Tradition which is quite enmeshed with the Nath Tradition it will be seen that caste is not the main factor but spiritual capability is.

In the mini-biographies of Datta-saints in the following pages we see both types of devotees and also that Dattatreya himself in conformity with his association with Nath Sect did not practice *varnashramdharma* for he has non-Brahmin disciples and Muslims too. But probably we have to live with this dichotomy for ages to come. We shall now start with the biographies.

3. GORAKSHANATH

Though Macchindranath (Matsyendranath) is considered as the founder of the Nath Sect, it is his disciple Gorakshanath who is the real star of the sect. Like Shri Dattatreya he was also a wandering yogi and a learned person.

The life of Gorakshanath (or Gorakhnath) is astounding. The legend of his birth is mysterious and goes thus: Macchindranath, the first of the Naths, came to the house of a childless woman to beg for alms. He was moved by her prayers for a son and gave her some ashes to be eaten for getting a child. But her neighbour misguided her saying that these mendicants practiced black magic and she should not eat the ash. The unfortunate lady threw the ashes into a heap of cow-dung outside the house and forgot all about it. Ten years passed. Macchindranath returned to that house and enquired about the child. The woman was now frightened and pointed to the heap of cow-dung. Macchindranath shouted, "Come out Gorak-

shanath." And a ten year old bright looking boy came out of the heap. To the chagrin of the woman Macchindranath took away the boy with him as his disciple. Macchindranath named him Gorakshanath (because he was found under the heap of cow-dung), initiated and trained him well as a Nath yogi.



Shri Gorakshanath

Discounting the fantasy, Gorakshanath's origin is shrouded in mystery. Historians differ as regards his origin or even his times. He was definitely born after Adi Shankaracharya (eighth century). His time is quoted as anywhere between 10th century and 12th century, the most probable time being 11th century. He is variously presented as son of a cultured Brahmin family, son of a Brahmin widow, a *Shudra* and so on. The place of his birth also is disputed, but from the language of his writings he seems to have been born in Punjab, probably north of Peshawar. He travelled to Nepal where he and his Guru Macchindranath are still worshipped as deities. Nepali Gurkhas consider him as their God and the term Gurkha is said to originate from his name. All agree that he was an extremely handsome person.

Gorakshanath became learned in the Vedic philosophy as well as yoga and attained Siddhis. He travelled throughout India many times and has composed poems and written in many Indian languages. His stress was on *Hathayoga* and *Pranayama* with the practice of which Kundalini could be activated for accelerating spiritual progress. What he is best known for is his courage and intelligence in freeing his guru from the shackles of the Tantric cult. Tantric cult involves use of five M's namely Madya (liquor), Mansa (meat), Meena (fish), Mudra (physical posture or mental attitude to avoid contamination), and Mithuna (sex). Gorakshanath's personality was such that he could extract his Guru from the clutches of these practices. In the legendary folklore, this is described in terms of a fantasy story of Machchindranath being lured by Mainakini (this name differs in different versions of the story) the ruler of an all female kingdom in which no men were allowed. She married him, got a son from him and did not let him go away. Gorakshanath went dressed as a player of *mridanga* (a percussion instrument) and when he was playing during a dance he brought out sounds which told Macchindranath that his disciple Gorakshanath had come. Gorakshanath succeeded taking his Guru away from the female kingdom, but Macchindranath was still drawn towards his son and wealth. Gorakshanath showed him that these are all impermanent and they can create several such sons and wealth using the occult powers acquired by them. Following this incident, Gorakshanath made a strict code of dress and behavior for Nath yogis that included celibacy.

There is an interesting story told about Gorakshanath's meeting with Dattatreya at Girnar (Ref: pp 132-133, Dattatreya Dnyanakosha, P.N.Joshi, See Bibliography). While going to Somanath in Saurashtra Gorakshanath came to Girnar. After making obeisance to Mother Amba and visiting the Dattatreya *padukas* he came to know that Shri Dattatreya lives in a nearby cave. After some search he reached the cave where he saw an unclothed, ash-smeared *avadhuta* with long, tangled hair in an excited, demented mood. He was wondering whether this was Dattatreya (*avadhuta* is one who has washed away all his pas-

sions). It was time for afternoon alms (for *Sanyasis*). Gorakshanath removed his wallet (*jholi*) which flew in the sky and returned with excellent food. He then asked that *avadhuta* whether he would eat something to which the avadhuta replied that he takes only cow milk. Gorakshanath then asked who brings the milk to which avadhuta replied that nobody brings milk but his *kamandalu* was always full with it. To test the avadhuta Gorakshanath asked whether he would get milk for the alms to which the avadhuta replied that he would be happy if he takes all the milk in the *kamandalu*. Gorakshanath took the *kamandalu* and started pouring milk in his vessel. He was astonished to note that while milk was streaming out of the *kamandalu* there was nothing in it. Seeing that *avadhuta's* siddhis are more powerful than his own Gorakshanath realized he has met Dattatreya and immediately touched his feet. Dattatreya taught him several aspects of yoga and spiritual philosophy which are included in Gorakshanath's books.

The summary of what Dattatreya told him is: "Oh avadhuta Gorakshanath, I am neither Brahmadeo nor a *brahmachari* (an aspirant for *sanyasa*, it also means a celibate); I am not a learned Brahmin or an ordained *sanyasi* or yogi. I wander freely and happily like a *jivanmukta* (liberated while living) which I have become by my own grace." He further explained that, "I go around sometimes secretly and sometimes openly. There is no desire, no wind and no Maya in the highest state. In this state there is neither form nor formlessness, neither subtleness nor grossness, there is neither water nor water-drop, neither mirror nor a reflection, neither Dattatreya nor Gorakshanath; there is neither object nor its illusion; there is only the only Highest Principle. Oh Gorakshanath, forgiveness is my mother, truth is my father and Knowledge is my Guru. The unidentifiable Brahman is my abode. It is subtle, infinite and beyond dogma. Supreme Lord is the Guru and the soul is the disciple. In a thought-free condition many occult powers come together. Once the Sahasrara (thousand petal lotus at the top of the head) opens one goes in an *unmani* state (beyond mind). The mature state of meditation is the mindless *unmani* state. In this state mind rests completely.

Listen, Oh Gorakshanath, anger is like a thorn for those who tread the spiritual path. To surrender to anger is to drown in this ocean of earthly life. A person who is enmeshed in *karmas* is a bound person. Oh *avadhuta*, Brahma is real and Maya is unreal. Word (Om) is real but the body generated from it unreal. *Dhyana* (meditative state) is the state in which awareness remains in Brahman and becomes Brahman. Shakti is the power that sustains everything Shiva is One who makes Shakti do it. Individual soul is the earth, nether and the sky and its master is the supreme souls. The understanding that they are not separate is Knowledge. Self-realization thus attained is the true form of knowledge. I am ever one with everything and this state is called transcendence. Once one becomes acquainted with this Datta principle, nothing more remains to be told.

Shri Dattatreya gave this and similar advice also to Matsyendranath, Jalandharnath and Revananath. (Revananath was initiated into the Nath sect by Shri Dattatreya).

Shri Dattatreya then showed his real form and blessed Gorakshanath. The place where this happened in Girnar is known as Kamandalu Tirtha.

Gorakshanath has written 28 books in Sanskrit and 40 in Hindi. His well-known books include Hathayogapradeep, Gorakshasamhita, Gorakhdattagushti and Sabadi.

Gorakshanath did not bother about the caste system or even about the religion while initiating his disciples. He initiated women also. There are many Muslims in the Raval branch of Gorakshanath branch of Nath sect. In fact the Nath yogis belonged to diverse castes e.g. Jalandharnath belonged to a very low untouchable class.

Two other famous Nath yogis are said to have been initiated by Shri Dattatreya. These were Nagnath and Revannath. We noted earlier the similarity in the dresses and general appearance depicted for Shri Dattatreya and the Nath Panthi yogis. Yogis in both Nath and Dattatreya tradition are called *avadhutas*.

4. MAHANUBHAVA SAINTS

Shri Dattatreya is greatly revered in Mahanubhava sect founded by Chakradhar Swami (1194-1274 AD). This sect has a large following in the Vidarbha-Khandesh region of Maharashtra. The root of this high place for Shri Dattatreya seems to be Chakrapani, the Guru of Chakradhar Swami, further strengthened by Govindaprabhu another disciple of Chakrapani. The relation between Chakrapani and Chakradhar involves use of yogic Siddhis as will be clear later. **It must be noted that while in other Datta tradition sects Shri Dattatreya is considered as an avatar of a deity (Vishnu), in Mahanubhava sect he is considered as an avatar of Parameshwar the Supreme deity. Also he is depicted as one-head-two-hands deity.**

***Chakrapani*:** Chakrapani was son of Janakanayak and Janakaisa, a family belonging to Karhade Brahmin sect, from Phaltan near Satara in southern Maharashtra. They earned their living by commercial trade. Janakanayak longed for a son and even married a second time (a common thing in those days) but in vain. Janakaisa's parents who were from Chakan near Pune also prayed and made vows to the deity Chakrapani of Chakan, while Janakanayak himself had made another vow to another deity called Changdeo. Ultimately a son was born and was named Chakrapani by the maternal grandparents and Changdeo by Janakanayak. From childhood itself Changdeo was detached from worldly affairs including the family business. He was married to Kamalaisa but he was not much interested in marital bliss either. This led to tiffs and made him sick of family life. Following another tiff he left home for pilgrimage.

Once he joined a group of pilgrims and went to Mahur. Mahur (old Matapur) is located in Kinwat Taluka, Nanded District about six hours road journey from Nagpur. It is one of the holy places in relation to Shri Dattatreya. It is believed that Shri Dattatreya comes to sleep there at night. (See the experience of Purohitswami later). There are many holy lakes at Mahur. There is a lake near the base of the Mahur fort, called Merumala. Changdeo, along with his co-pilgrims took bath in the lake and was going through the forest path to visit the temple where Shri Dattatreya comes to sleep, when suddenly a tiger roared and came in his path. Everybody else ran away but Changdeo stood there quietly with the strong conviction that it was Shri Dattatreya who had come in the form of the tiger. The tiger kept his front paw on Changdeo's head and gave him what is known as Shaktipat initiation (See Part VII-3 later).

Changdeo remained in Mahur for many years. He used to roam in the jungles and live on alms. From there he went to Dwarawati and lived in a cave on the banks of Gomati River. He used to take a broom and a dust-pan and clean the streets of Dwarawati. He initiated fifty-two persons by hitting them on head with the broom or the dust-pan. Changdeo never differentiated between persons and did not bother about the strongly prevalent caste system. He used to eat in the homes of *Shudras* as well as of untouchables. He was known for his yogic Siddhis. One day he left his body by the yogic process and entered the body of one Harpaldeo who was brought to the cremation ground after death for cremation. This Harpaldeo about whom we shall read later came to be known as Chakradhar, the founder of Mahanubhava sect mentioned earlier. Changdeo or Chakrapani's period must have been the second half of twelfth century.

Govindaprabhu Govindaprabhu was born in a village near Riddhipur in a Brahmin family. His original name was Gundo. His parents died when he was about two years old and he was fostered by his maternal uncle. Gundo was extremely intelligent and had a detached nature. He was initiated by Chakrapani while on a pilgrimage to Dwarawati. He was a strict celibate and was like his Guru in behaviour as well as yogic prowess. He has a high place of honour in the Mahanubhava sect and is considered an avatar. Technically it was he who initiated Chakradhar Swami which is another reason why he is so revered in the sect.

Chakradhar Swami **T**he kingdom of Bharuch in Gujarat had a minister by name Vishaldeo. His wife's name was Malhaisa. Both were devotees of Shri Dattatreya by whose grace a son was born to them. The son was named Harpaldeo who married Kamalaisa. Harpaldeo was fond of gambling. One day he suddenly fell ill and died. When the body was taken to the cremation ground Changdeo or Chakrapani entered his

body by yogic powers as mentioned earlier. Harpaldeo became alive but naturally as a new personality. He became more detached. But his liking for gambling still lingered. One day he lost heavily and his wife Kamalaisa refused to give him her ornaments to bail him out. This made him become disenchanted with the world and still more detached. One day he left home and went to Ramtek near Nagpur. During this pilgrimage he met Govindaprabhu at Riddhipur and received Shaktipat initiation from him. Govindaprabhu named him Chakradhar. Thus we have an unusual case of a disciple initiating his own guru but in a new body.

After his initiation Chakradhar spent twelve years in *tapas* on a hill called Salbardi. He came to conclusion that salvation of people lay in three principles namely **truth, non-violence and equality** and he set upon teaching them. In the course of his travels he came across a Siddhayogi by name Udhalinath from whom he learnt the yogic technique of maintaining youth. He then travelled to Warangal in Andhra Pradesh where he married Hansamba, the beautiful daughter of a horse dealer. After spending some time in marital life his original detached nature raised its head. He left the marital life and went to Bhandara in Vidarbha where he had his first disciple by name Nilkanth Bhandarkar. His second disciple was one Ramdarna from Aljapur with whose daughter he had his third marriage. He had many more disciples both male and female.

In the course of time Chakradhar reached Paithan where he chose to renounce the world to become a sanyasi. Now he ardently started educating public in his principles and taught people the power of love. He saved the ignorant people who used to worship ordinary deities. Thus the sect began. There is no place for caste distinction or male-female distinction in his sect. He practiced equality and used to eat and sit with people of any caste including the untouchables. He adopted the local language Marathi for his writings in preference to Sanskrit preferred by the learned. He could thus reach common people. Of course he had to face a lot of opposition from the orthodox people but he and his disciples faced it with courage.

This was the period when Muslim rule had spread and the religious practices of the Hindus were being suppressed. To prevent their writings from being discovered and interpreted as religious writings and be destroyed by Muslims Mahanubhava literature began to use coded language in their books.

Chakradhar’s philosophy is a dualistic (Dwaita) philosophy. Shi Dattatreya is considered as Guru of Chakrapani and founder of the sect. They believe that Shri Dattatreya lives in all the four yugas (aeons) and that his words are like nectar showering happiness.

At Mahur there is a place called Devatirtha which has the samadhi of Chakradhar. There, in one hall there are two beds, one small and another quite large. It is the large bed which is said to be where Shri Dattatreya sleeps at night. The small bed is that of Shri Chakradhar. It is believed that because of his unorthodox philosophy and behaviour he was caught by the Devagiri Chief minister Hemadpant and was beheaded; however, some say that he went to Himalayas and did not return. But it is a fact that after the Nath Panthi yogis the Dattatreya tradition was kept alive by the Mahanubhava sect of Chakradhar.

5. JANARDANSWAMI, EKNATH, DASOPANT, MUKTESHWAR

Keeping the spiritual flame alive during the Muslim rule has been quite a formidable task for Hindu saints. Shri Narasimha Saraswati kept himself and his disciples clear of the Muslim kings by insisting that they should not serve Muslim rulers. There is another class of saints who kept the flame alive by staying with the rulers who, it must be acknowledged, did respect the high spiritual status of these saints. Janardanswami, Eknath and Dasopant belong to this class. Eknath was disciple of Janardanswami.

Janardanswami (1504-1575 AD) Janardanswami was born in 1504 AD in a Brahmin family named Deshpande from Chalisgaon in the Khandesh region of Maharashtra. The family was quite religious and used to

observe all the traditional rituals prescribed for Brahmins. From childhood Janardanswami showed interest in religious aspects of life. At the age of 21 he started his family life by marrying two girls at the same time (polygamy was not uncommon in those days). Reader may not know that the Surname "Deshpande" comes from the assignment from the government to collect taxes on its behalf, keep a proper account of the same and assist in the administration. This assignment usually was passed on from father to son. This was thus the family occupation of Janardanswami who balanced his time well between the family and the official duties. As part of the religious duties he used to visit the places of importance to Datta tradition viz. Kuravpur, Narsobawadi, Oudumber and Ankalkhop. It was at Ankalkhop that he received the grace from Shri Dattatreya.

Janardanswami had accepted the service of the Muslim rulers at Daulatabad, (formerly Devagiri the capital of Yadava dynasty). However his spiritual pursuits continued and he used to regularly read Gurucharitra, Dnyaneshwari etc. (remember that books were not easily available in those days and had to be copied laboriously from somebody else's copy.) He also spent time in meditation for which he found Gorakshaguha, a cave named after Gorakshanath and a temple called Durgatirtha nearby as very suitable. After performing his daily religious rituals he used to go to court and take part in Government business with total sincerity. His moral character and spiritual status had impressed even the rulers and it is said that in the area under his control they had made Thursday (the day related to Datta tradition) as weekly holiday instead of the usual Friday under a Muslim rule. There is a place called Sulabhanjan hill, 5-8 Km away from Daulatabad where there are many Shiva temples. There is a lake named Suryakunda and a place called Sahasralinga (literally thousand *lingas*) nearby. Janardanswami found this place suitable for meditating on Shri Dattatreya and used to visit it regularly. It was here that Shri Dattatreya appeared before him, kept his benevolent hand on his head and initiated him. Thus Janardanswami, according to his disciple Saint Eknath, becomes the first disciple of Shri Dattatreya in this Kaliyuga. Though devotion to Shri Dattatreya forms the main stream of his spiritual path, there is also an important place for devotion to Shri Krishna (Vithal) too in his spiritual life.

As said earlier, Janardanswami used to go on pilgrimage often. During his visit to Nashik-Tryambakeshwar (one of the Jyotirlingas) he met a Brahmin named Chandrabodha. Apparently they had some spiritual discussions between them and as a result of this some think, though others dispute, that Chandrabodha was Guru of Janardanswami. Incidentally, this Chandrabodha became a (Muslim) Sufi later and was Guru to the Muslim Sufi saint Sheikh Mahamad, author of a Marathi composition called *Siddhantbodha*.

Shri Janardanswami took samadhi on 6th day of dark fortnight of *Falgun* in 1575 AD. It is said that he took *jalasamadhi* (i.e. leaving the body by entering water or drowning in common parlance) in the lake inside the Daulatabad fort. His body was never found even though the lake is not very deep. It is a coincidence that his birth, appearance of Shri Dattatreya to him and samadhi as well as the day on which he initiated his famous disciple Eknath and samadhi of the latter, all fall on the 6th day of dark fortnight of Falgun. He has written a few small compositions but they are not so well known. There are many Maths established in his name by his disciples. Noted among them are at Varanasi, Daulatabad, Beed, Charathana (in Parabhani district) and Tapovan in Nashik.

Saint Eknath (1533-1599 AD) Once in a while a person of remarkable character and ability is born whose imprint on public life remains for centuries. Saint Eknath was such a person. Eknath is known for strengthening the path of devotion. He translated part of Bhagwat Purana, one of the prominent compositions to followers of the Bhakti (devotion) path, into Marathi the language of the common people in Maharashtra and made it available to them in the language they understood. But his greatest contribution was his producing a corrected copy of Dnyaneshwari, the commentary in Marathi by Saint Dnyaneshwar on Bhagvad-Gita. The original version of Dnyaneshwari had become corrupted during the two and a half centuries that had elapsed after the samadhi of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, through the process of hand copying (Re-

member that there were no printing presses those days) and because some poets added their own compositions to the original. We owe the present version of Dnyaneshwari to Saint Eknath.

Saint Eknath was born in a family which worshipped Vithal, the name by which Shri Krishna is known in Maharashtra. Vithal is the presiding deity of Pandharpur one of the holiest places for the Vaishnava *varkari* sect in Maharashtra. Members of the Varkari sect make annual visits to Pandharpur to see Vithal on the Ekadashi (11th day) in the month of Ashadha, singly or in groups defying the heavy rains and risking cholera. Though Eknath also finally followed the Varkari path his earlier devotion was to Shri Dattatreya.

Eknath's parents died when he was a child and he was brought up by his grandfather Chakrapani (not the Mahanubhava one). From childhood itself Eknath was interested in religious aspects of life. He ran away from home in search of a Guru and came in contact with Janardanswami who became his Guru. Eknath was a meticulous person. Once Janardanswami found him working late in the night the reason being that there was a mistake of a small amount in the accounts which he used to keep for his guru. Janardanswami was pleased with him.

Eknath served his Guru well and was favoured by an appearance of Shri Dattatreya in the lonely forests of Devgiri. Shri Dattatreya appeared before him in the form of a Malang (i.e. a Muslim fakir) accompanied by a female dog. The Malang milked the dog, mixed some old bread from his bag with the milk and shared the strange food with Eknath. In those days it would have been unthinkable for a Brahmin boy to eat sitting by the side of a Muslim, leave alone eating the food touched by him, but Eknath had realised that he was dealing with Shri Dattatreya himself and did not hesitate. In fact after he was handed over the empty dish for cleaning Eknath drank the remains of the food with water which pleased the Malang as an indication of deep faith. The Malang then showed Eknath his real form as Shri Dattatreya, further proving the closeness of his Guru with Shri Dattatreya. Now Eknath was deeply involved with Dattatreya and even when he wrote Bhagwat in Marathi he makes obeisance to Shri Dattatreya in the beginning. Later also Shri Dattatreya appeared before him many times. He used to go to the Sulabhonjan hill for meditation and was granted favours by Shri Dattatreya. (*Bhaktavijay* by Mahipati gives the story slightly differently. It is mentioned in Volume I Part II of this book. Se below also).

It was mentioned earlier that saints belonging to Datta-tradition can be extremely orthodox or extremely liberal as regards the caste system. Saint Eknath seems to have belonged to the latter class for he never bothered about the castes and is reputed to have taken meals in a house of (in those days) an untouchable family in spite of the opposition from the local Brahmins. Eknath's compassion even for animals and forgiveness to his worst torturers is legendary and the reader should make it a point to read his biography to understand the true nature of a saint. (There is one biography in English written by an American Missionary Mr. Justin E. Abbott. Mr. Abbott, in spite of belonging to the Christian faith was so much impressed by the works of the Indian saints, notably Tukaram and Eknath in Maharashtra that he has written their biographies as well as translated many of their works in English. One of the books translated by him is Mahipati's *Bhaktavijaya* which gives the biographies of many Indian saints. These books are available with the publishers M/S Motilal Banarasidas. Mr. Abbott passed away in 1932 at his home in Summit, New Jersey USA).

Another legend about Saint Eknath (though not related to Datta-tradition) is that in order to help him Shri Krishna worked in his home as a domestic servant under the name Shrikhandya for several years. When this was discovered and Eknath reproached him for serving him, Shri Krishna asked, "I had to come in disguise. Had I come the way you see me now, would you have let me stay with you and serve you?" Saint Eknath took samadhi in 1599 AD at Paithan.

Dasopant (1551-1615 AD) Dasopant was born in the wealthy Deshpande family from Narayanpeth under the rulership of Bahamani Kingdom of Bidar. One year when the region was reeling under severe draught, his father Digambarpant who was a Government official, distributed the grains in government

granary to the hungry public on his own authority. He could not however deposit the price of the grains in the government treasury in time. The king was angry and took Dasopant, then a boy, away for ransom until the money was paid, further threatening that if the money was not paid within a month the boy would be converted to Muslim religion. Both Digambarpant and Dasopant intently prayed to Shri Dattatreya for relief and surprisingly an unknown person who gave his name as Datta Padewar deposited the required amount in the treasury and Dasopant was released.

Everybody was happy but Dasopant was overcome with detachment after this demonstration of Divine power. He left home in search of Shri Dattatreya who had answered his prayers. He reached Matapur or Mahur via Dakulgi and Nanded and remained in its peaceful environment for twelve years serving Shri Dattatreya through meditation and other daily spiritual procedures. After twelve years he again resumed his wandering and reached Rakshasbhuvan on the banks of Godavari. Here, he received the gift of *padukas* (sandals) of Shri Dattatreya and was blessed by his appearance in Avadhuta form. In the course of time he reached the place of confluence of Vani river where perchance he met his family members. As per the custom prescribed in the *Shastras*, his wife had waited twelve years for his return and was to be now declared a widow after performing the prescribed rites. The dramatic reunion was an occasion of joy for everybody. After meeting his parents and wife Dasopant gifted away his titular rights of the position of Deshpande and came to stay in Ambejogai near Parli Vaijanath. One Sitopant Deshpande became his disciple and arranged for his stay in Ambejogai. Dasopant wrote prolifically on Shri Dattatreya and on spiritual matters. He also set up a particular ritualistic method of daily Dattatreya worship.

Mukteshwar Mukteshwar belongs to the seventeenth century. He was the grandson of Eknath i.e. daughter Godavari's son. His father's name was Chintamani. His mother's name was changed to Gangubai after marriage.

Like his grandfather he also was a devotee of Shri Dattatreya. But while his grandfather came from a family with tradition of devotion to Vithoba, Mukteshwar's family was devoted to Bhairava, a form of Shiva. His family worshipped Shri Dattatreya in the form of Lila Vishwambhar (Vishwambhar is a name of Shiva). Thus his worship of Shri Dattatreya had a Shaivaite inclination.

Mukteshwar is known for his poetry, beautiful language and descriptions of nature. His compositions are in Marathi verse. His main work includes Ramayana and many chapters from Mahabharata. Other compositions include the biography of his grandfather Eknath. The inspiration for writing Ramayana came to him while he was at Narsobawadi, the well known place of pilgrimage for Shri Dattatreya devotees. He established a Dattatreya temple at Terwad.

6. TWO DEVOTEES FROM UTTAR PRADESH

While most of the devotees of Shri Dattatreya are from Maharashtra-Karnataka- Andhra region, there are two devotees of note came from Uttar Pradesh. These are Kinaram Aghori (1620-1772 AD) and Nipat Niranjan (1623-1728 AD).

Kinaram Aghori He was born around 1620, or may be a little earlier, in a pious Kshatriya family in Ramgarh which falls in the Chandoli tehsil of Varanasi District in U.P. From early age itself he showed spiritual tendencies e.g. he developed the habit of sitting under a banyan tree meditating when he was a child. He had no desire to get married but it was forced upon him. Fortunately for him the bride died before the marriage took place. He then left his home quietly in search of a Guru and in the course of his search met one Shivaramji, a Ramanuja sect saint, at Karo in Gazipur district in U.P. Shivramji had predicted that Kinaram would reach great heights in the spiritual field. He left Shivramji after sometime because Kinaram did not like that Shivramji had remarried after the death of his wife. Kinaram then came to a place called Naigarhi where he performed a miracle. An old lady's son owed the local landlord some money which he was unable to pay back. As the dispute about payment was going on Kinaram asked the landlord to dig the ground on which the son was standing. To everybody's surprise a pot of gold coins was found which settled the dues. The boy was so affected by this event that he became Kinaram's disciple, left home and

accompanied Kinaram in his wanderings. Kinaram renamed the boy as Bijaram. Both now set for Girnar the place well known for the presence of Shri Dattatreya.

When they reached Junagarh, then ruled by a Muslim *nawab*, Kinaram left Bijaram in the city and went up the Girnar Mountain alone. After visiting the temple of Goddess Amba and the Dhuni (fire) of Gorakshanath he went to the Shri Dattatreya peak (where *Padukas* of Shri Dattatreya have been installed) and fasted for seven days. Gorakshanath appeared before him there and gave him spiritual advice. But Kinaram was anxious to meet Shri Dattatreya himself. He decided to circumambulate (*pradakshina*) the mountain peak through the thick forest. But he lost his way and when night came he could not see anything in the dark. Kinaram prayed to the mountain itself and suddenly saw the light of a fire burning some distance away. Going ahead he saw a yogi with brown coloured *jata* (long tangled hair worn by ascetics), clad in a deerskin sitting near the fire. Kinaram made his obeisance and was offered some roots which were being roasted in the fire. Eating them Kinaram was not only free of his hunger and thirst but a strange new energy pervaded him. When the ascetic asked him why he had entered the jungle at night Kinaram replied that “Puri, Dwarka, the banks of Gomati and Ganges cause one’s liberation from this material world, so says Shri Dattatreya.” On hearing this, the ascetic who was Shri Dattatreya himself appeared before him in his real form and initiated him by telling him a mantra called Aghori mantra in his ear. Then keeping his hand on Kinaram’s head Shri Dattatreya imparted his energy into him for activating the Kundalini (Shaktipat method of initiation). Kinaram spent that night discussing many spiritual matters with his Guru. For Kinaram it was a very memorable night of bliss. In the morning Shri Dattatreya instructed him to complete the circumambulation of Girnar, make a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and then settle in Varanasi. Shri Dattatreya then vanished.

From Girnar Kinaram returned to Junagarh to meet his disciple Bijaram and found that the Nabab i.e. the Muslim ruler had arrested all the holy men in the capital and put them in prison. Kinaram went there and to teach the Nawab a lesson and show him the power of holy men, performed the miracle of making the grinding stones in the prison turn automatically. As a result Nawab not only released all the holy men but welcomed them and established a centre for providing free meals to the pilgrims visiting Girnar.

As instructed Kinaram made a pilgrimage of the holy places in the Himalayas and then settled in Varanasi under a tamarind tree near Krimikund. The naturally sour leaves of the tamarind tree began to taste sweet by his touch. A sweet fragrance used to waft around his body. He was fond of smoking *hookah* and of music. While in Varanasi, Kinaram performed many miracles but Dattaguru appeared to him many times in the form of an Aghori ascetic named Kaluram, tested him and proved the uselessness of the occult powers.

One day in 1772 AD on the day he had announced he would take samadhi he sat in *Siddhasana* pose, pronounced *Aum* thrice and left his body by yogic powers. He was about 150 years old at that time. He was buried there itself (Yogis are not cremated but buried in sitting pose). It is said that fragrance is emitted from the samadhi on certain days and music can be heard.

Kinaram was a contemporary of Saint Tulsidas, the author of Ramcharitmanas. There is an interesting story about him and Kinaram. In Varanasi there was a rich merchant who had no son. He served Tulsidas for many years and prayed that he should be blessed with a son. Tulsidas promised to speak to Shri Rama about it. When Tulsidas spoke to Shri Rama at night about the merchant’s request, Shri Rama saw what was written in the merchant’s destiny and found that no son would be born to him in ten births. He told this to Tulsidas who in turn informed the merchant that he was not destined to get a son. But the traders do not give up hope easily. He stopped going to Tulsidas and went to Kinaram Aghori instead. One day he took a dish of tasty meals to Kinaram. Kinaram partook of three *puris* (fried flatbread) and vegetables and feeling pleased asked the merchant what was behind this service. The merchant expressed his desire for a son and Kinaram promised him three sons, one for each *puri he ate*. When the first son was born the merchant celebrated the occasion with ceremonial worship and gifts. When Tulsidas came to know about this he felt hurt and complained to Shri Rama. Then Shri Rama explained that when Tulsidas requested for a

son for the merchant it was merely a request but Kinaram sacrificed his own liberation gained from his *sadhana*, even though it meant consequent rebirths for him, in return for the birth of a son to the merchant and that it was that sacrifice made for the sake of others that made the big difference.

Nipatniranjan The period of this second Datta devotee from north is 1623-1738 AD. He was a Goud Brahmin from Chanderi in Bundelkhand in U.P. He had religious inclination from childhood itself and liked to sing *bhajans*. At the age of forty he came along with his aged mother to settle in Aurangabad. For survival he used to fabricate armour for the warriors. But the business failed and he became so poor that there was no money even for the final rites of his mother when she died. Disgusted, he applied the ashes from his mother's funeral pyre on his body and became a renunciate. He now spent his time in meditation and yoga practice. After some time he was blessed with the appearance of Shri Dattatreya. His Guru was one Charpatinat. He had attained the powers of the Siddhis. It is said that even Aurangzeb the Mughal emperor was impressed by his powers. He has left many poems behind him.

7. NARAYANSWAMI

The course of life of Narayanswami is strange and interesting. It shows the extent to which God interacts with a devotee and guides him even in the absence of a spiritual Guru. He was born in a Deshastha Brahmin family of name Joshi from Visapur. He was very learned in *Shastra's* and a man of excellent character. He remarried after his wife died and had a son by the second marriage. He was leading a happy life but once he was defeated in a debate on *Shastras* in a meeting of pundits held in Pune. This was a shock to him and he left home for further studies under some able master at Varanasi. There he became an expert in the *Shastras* under the tutelage of an able Guru. Understanding the real reason for his desire for learning and in order that his learning should not be wasted in debates, his master took a promise from him as Gurudakshina (present to one's Guru on completion of learning) that he would never defeat anybody in any debate. Narayanswami returned home and again resumed family life. He had two more children, both daughters, before his second wife also died. Leaving his son in Pune for studies, he came to Kolhapur with his two daughters and served Goddess Mahalakshmi ardently. She instructed him to go to Narsobawadi and pray to Shri Dattatreya. Accordingly he came to Narsobawadi with his two daughters and began his worship of Shri Dattatreya.

After constant meditation on Shri Dattatreya he received his blessings and was able to reach the state of *samadhi*. He used to be in this state in predawn hours. After coming out of that state he used to spend time looking after his two small daughters who had to be taken out for the morning ablutions and toilet. One day a strange thing occurred. The girls woke up earlier than usual while their father was still in the state of samadhi and began calling him for taking them out for toilet. Shri Dattatreya came in the form of their father and did the needful. He washed their feet and put them back to bed. When Narayanswami came out of samadhi he awakened his daughters for taking them for their morning ablutions. But the daughters told him that he had just taken them and why he was asking them to go again. This puzzled him but when the girls even showed him the place where they had gone (in those days and even today it is customary in villages to go and sit in open fields for toilet), he was convinced that Shri Dattatreya himself had come in his form so that he would not be disturbed in the state of samadhi. He was sad for causing Shri Dattatreya to serve him and he arranged for the marriages of the two girls. Now that he was rid of encumbrances he was free to pursue his spiritual routines and was longing to be initiated as a *sanyasi* in proper way. The story of his initiation is really fantastic and it occurred at the place mentioned in Gurucharitra where the sixty-four *yoginis* used go and worship Shri Narasimha Saraswati.

He had been praying for his initiation as a *sanyasi* when he received the divine message that it would occur at proper time. Narayanswami used to go daily at dawn to the nearby confluence of Krishna with Panchganga for his bath. One day he slipped and fell into the river. Inside the water he saw Shri Narasimha Saraswati present and ready with all the preparations to initiate him as a sanyasi. Shri Narasimha Saraswati performed all the rituals of the initiation and gave him the ochre clothes of a sanyasi and the staff, and named him Shri Narayana Saraswati. When he came out of water he was dressed as a regular *sanyasi*

but nobody knew that he had undergone the initiation and that too by Shri Narasimha Saraswati himself. Thinking that he has taken on the dress himself without the rituals he was outcast by the local Brahmins.

Narayanswami used to sit in a closed room and if some devotee came and made obeisance to him from outside, he could hear the sound "Narayana" from inside the room. The local people were puzzled and one night the chief of the Math peeped through a hole in the door and to his amazement found Narayanswami praying to Narasimha (fourth avatar of Vishnu in the form of a man with lion head) with a large lion sitting in front of him. This was a shock to the chief who realized that Narayanswami was a great yogi. He asked to be forgiven and then was told the story of his initiation as a *sanyasi*. Narayanswami continued to live in Narsobawadi and took samadhi in the year 1805. This day is still celebrated annually there.

Thus we see how a person by sheer perseverance and devotion can attain the highest and how the Divine helps the seeker in his efforts in the smallest matters.

8. CHIDAMBAR DIKSHIT

It has been mentioned earlier that Datta-devotees fall into two types, the orthodox and liberal. Chidambar Dikshit belongs to the orthodox class. It has been stated that his task was to uphold the orthodox four-caste system which was deteriorating in his time. In fact the same is stated about Shri Dattatreya himself, a point that was discussed in the beginning of this section.

Chidambar Dikshit, born in Murgod in Karnataka, was the son of Martand Joshi, a Yajurvedi Brahmin from Gothe in Bijapur District. Martand Joshi had performed a yajna called Somayag and was therefore designated as Dikshit (initiated) which then became the surname or the family. Chidambar Dikshit had two wives, six sons and a daughter. He established a Vedic school at Murgod to teach Sanskrit, Shastras, and Vedas, but moved away from the village when a Brahmin was killed there. (Killing a Brahmin was supposed to be a very serious sin in the days of orthodoxy.) He travelled to many places in north Karnataka and in the year 1807 performed a yajna at Navalgund. He wrote many compositions in *abhanga* verse style the total *abhangas* numbering to more than one and a half lakhs (1 lakh = 100,000). Though orthodox in personal behaviour he had disciples from all castes and many sanyasis as well. One Rajaram Maharaj (who incidentally belonged to the Kshatriya caste) was his prime disciple. He has written his biography in more than one lakh *abhangs*. He was a principled person and stated that "We Brahmins should be charitable enough to give away their entire worldly wealth; one should not think that our *Dharma* lies in spreading our hand before others for begging." His own son once collected funds of more than one lakh rupees in his name. He felt very unhappy and distributed the entire amount to the poor. Chidambar Dikshit was considered as an avatar of Shri Dattatreya and it has been mentioned by his disciples that they were told in vision that he was an avatar and there was no difference between Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Chidambar Dikshit. His Samadhi is at Gurlhosur in Karnataka.

9. RAGHUNATHBHATJI NASHIKAKAR

There is a village called Ashoka on the banks of river Malaprabha now in Karnataka State. Raghunath was the son of Ganeshbhat Alawnikar from this village. He had an elder brother and a sister. From childhood he had the habit of sitting in meditation. His father arranged for the marriages of the two elder children and fixed the date for Raghunath's marriage too but when Raghunath learnt about it he ran away from home and reached Nashik. He was about twelve years of age at that time.

The parents were terribly grieved. Not having any clue as to where Raghunath might have gone, they decided to search for him in Varanasi where many seekers drift. Unfortunately, not finding him in Varanasi both ended their lives by drowning themselves into the Ganges.

In Nashik, Raghunath stayed on the banks of Godavari, doing the daily rituals like s*andhya* etc. prescribed for Brahmins. But he did not go out for alms and remained without food for seven days, drinking only Godavari water during this period. One day, one Bajirao Balwant Phadke, a Brahmin of excellent character

noticed him and felt attracted towards him. Phadke enquired about him and took him home. He was assigned the daily worship in his house and was sent to one Joglekarshastri for studying Sanskrit and Shastras. Joglekarshastri was known as a highly learned person in Nashik. Raghunath learnt, to the surprise of all, the ten books (four Vedas and six Shastras) in no time by heart. One day Raghunath performed the worship and while he sat for meditation he disappeared from view all of a sudden. This surprised Phadke who searched for him everywhere and when he could not be found closed the door of the worship room. He peeped into the room some time later and was shocked to see Raghunath sitting in deep meditation but levitated couple of feet above the floor. Phadke then realized that Raghunath was no ordinary person but a great yogi. From that day Phadke addressed him as "Maharaj", the term used to address great yogis and behaved respectfully with him.

The daily routine of Raghunath Maharaj was to go at dawn to the Godavari bank, take bath and perform *Sandhya*, *Japa* etc. until sunrise. Then he would return to Phadke's home for performing worship and meditation, take food in the afternoon and later meet people to solve their doubts. At sunset time he would again go to the river for the evening *Sandhya*. Sometimes he would spend the night meditating in a dilapidated house or in the forest. During one such sojourn in the forest he saw Shri Dattatreya and prostrated before him. They spent the night talking and decided to meet in the dilapidated house every night. These meetings were witnessed by only one person, that fortunate person being Niranjanswami the disciple of Raghunath Maharaj who was instructed to undertake writing. Niranjanswami or Niranjan Raghunath realised that his Guru and Shri Dattatreya are one and the same. Raghunath Maharaj who was also known as Adwaiteshwar took Samadhi live i.e. he sat in yogic posture and let his consciousness leave the body deliberately by yogic means as Dnyaneshwar Maharaj had done. His Samadhi is in Nashik itself. There is a Shivalinga installed at the location which is known as Adwaiteshwar. The devotees of Raghunath Maharaj celebrate Mahashivaratri there elaborately. His biography is written by Niranjan Raghunath. The period of Raghunathbhatji Nashikakar is eighteenth century. His disciples consider him to be a reincarnation of Rishi Bhrigu.

10. NIRANJAN RAGHUNATH (1782-1855)

Niranjan Raghunath was born in the year 1782 at Kalamb in Dharur Tehsil in South Hyderabad. His father's name was Shridharpant Shrotri. He was named Avadhuta at birth and renamed later as Niranjan by his Guru Raghunathbhatji Nashikakar. He was emotional by nature. He was poor and did not study much. He earned his living by doing some private service but was soon fed up with the world realizing it to be impermanent. He was longing for a vision of Shri Dattatreya in person. One day he left his home and came to Dehu, the place where saint Tukaram lived. Later (in 1811) he vowed that if he does not get the vision of Shri Dattatreya within one year and seven days he would kill himself. Then he left Dehu and came to Nashik where he met his Guru who was very happy to notice in him the detachment of a seeker and desire for spiritual goal. Within three months his Guru saw to it that he had the experience of the Brahman. Strangely, that did quench his desire for the vision of Shri Dattatreya. He then told his Guru about his vow and was advised to go to mount Girnar where he would have the desired vision.

He set upon his travel but arranged it such that he reached the Padukas on the mountain just three days before the period of vow was to end. After making his obeisance to the Padukas he told there that only three days were left and if he did not get the vision by then he would smash his own head with the nearby stone. So saying, he sat there repeating the name of Shri Dattatreya continuously. On the first night there was a storm with cold winds and rain. Niranjan was stiff with cold and became unconscious. In that state a married lady came there and gave him some *Khichadi* (cooked rice and pulses). When he came to senses there was nobody there. Next night he dreamt he received a yellow cloth and a handkerchief. When he woke up he found the items were really there. Third night a Brahmin came in his dream, gave him wooden sandals and asked him to leave the place. When he woke up he really found the sandals but there was no vision. Now in desperation he took the nearby stone and hit own head with it. On the second hit he fell unconscious. He gained consciousness to find somebody pouring water in his mouth. That was Shri Datta-

treya in person. He passed his hand on Niranjan's head and it became as before. Shri Dattatreya told him that he was not different from his Guru and to listen to the advice given by him. Thus ended his travails. He returned to Nashik and spent rest of his years with his Guru.

11. KAVADIBUVA (1776-1863)

Kavadibuva is known for his book Dattaprabodha which he wrote on the instructions of Shri Dattatreya. This is an instance where the higher powers arrange for spiritual guidance to people in different ways.

Kavadibuva's real name was Vithal Anant Pimpalgaonkar but he is also known as Anantsut Kavadibuva, Anantsut meaning son of Anant. He came from Pise Pimpalgaon in the Parner tehsil of Nagar district. His family held the hereditary post of "Kulkarni" (a sort of village clerk). The name Kavadibuva is derived from *kavad* (pronounced *kaavad*) which is a long staff generally made from thick bamboo strips with two large baskets hanging from each end. It is used for carrying material by supporting the staff on shoulders. (The system is used even today in India and far eastern countries like China, Vietnam etc.). Kavadibuva's father in his old age, had asked him to take him and Kavadibuva's mother on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Kavadibuva was very pious and also revered his parents. He agreed and as many people did in those days he seated his parents in either basket of the *kavad* and accompanied by a servant and a horse to carry provisions, set on the pilgrimage. Unfortunately his mother died en route and later, when reached Brahmavarta (in U.P.), his father became a sanyasi and he too died. After performing the death rituals Kavadibuva installed the idols of Vithoba and Rakhumai (the presiding deities of Pandharpur) in the *kavad* and continued the pilgrimage.

On the Dattajayanti (birthday of Shri Dattatreya which falls in December) he had camped in a village called Galav where, as part of the Dattajayanti celebrations, the local people were looking for a Kirtankar (a person who gives religious discourses). When saw Kavadibuva they requested him to undertake the task. He was hesitating when Shri Dattatreya came there in the form of a Brahmin and commanded him to undertake the task and also to take up writing, assuring that he would always be with him in his tasks. (One may ask how one would know the Brahmin was Shri Dattatreya, but it must be the inner intuition of Kavadibua that made the identification.) The Kirtan was a success and Kavadibuva resumed his travels. Now the task of writing remained. Again Shri Dattatreya came as a Brahmin and instructed him to start writing assuring again that he would get all the help. During his travels he reached Ujjain where he stayed for some time and wrote the first forty chapters of Dattaprabodha and then proceeded towards Dwarka. En route he reached Baroda in about 1856 where he met many other saints. By now he had many disciples. One of them built a temple of Shri Rama for him and requested him to stay there permanently. He agreed and installed there the idols of Vithoba and Rakhumai brought by him in the *kavad*. During the next year i.e. by about March 1860 (on the Hindu new year day) he completed the remaining twenty chapters of Dattaprabodha. He passed away three and half years later. His book was published by Mr., Damodar Savalaram Yande in the year 1900. The book contains the spiritual advice given by Shri Dattatreya to his mother Anasuya.

12. NARAYANMAHARAJ JALWANKAR (1807-1867)

He was the son of Tatya Puranik, a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahmin from Jalwan near Jhansi, now in Madhya Pradesh. Tatya Puranik had conducted readings of Bhagwat Purana one hundred times with the intention of begetting a son. Narayanmaharaj was born subsequently. His mother died when he was one year old and he was cared for by his grandmother. His father performed his thread ceremony when he was eight and got him married when he was ten.

Since childhood he was attracted to spiritual path and when he was just five years old, used to sit inside the wall cupboard for meditation for hours with closed eyes. When asked what he was doing there he used to reply that he was seeing God. After his marriage he was overcome by the feeling of detachment and left home. He came to Mathura and practiced Hathayoga under a well-known yogi called Gordhanbaba who also guided him into the meditation technique. After four years spent in yoga and meditation he

felt dissatisfied and boldly told so to Gordhanbaba who told him that he would be satisfied only when he meets Shri Dattatreya.

He returned home at the request of his father and stayed there for two years. He had a son but both his son and wife died within eight days of birth. Now he was without encumbrances and he went to mount Girnar where he spent his time in strict austerity and *tapas* with an intense desire to see Shri Dattatreya. He fasted for fourteen days vowing that if he did not see Shri Dattatreya then he would give up his body. On the fourteenth day, when there was no appearance of Shri Dattatreya he prepared himself to jump from the hill. As he was about to jump Shri Dattatreya appeared (not in his own form) and asked him what he was doing. When told that he was killing himself because he was not meeting Shri Dattatreya he asked him whether he thought killing himself would lead to his meeting Shri Dattatreya. Narayanmaharaj told him that he did not know that but he found life meaningless without meeting Shri Dattatreya. Shri Dattatreya then held his hand and took him to a cave where he showed him his form and satisfied him. His highest goal was achieved when he received spiritual advice from Shri Dattatreya himself. He remained at Girnar for four years during which period he benefited from the association with Niranjanswami, another Datta devotee mentioned earlier.

Returning from Girnar he travelled throughout India and helped whoever came to him for getting solace from worldly problems. *Sanyasis* also came to him for advice. His disciples are mostly around the Jhansi-Indore region and at Varanasi. The king of Dhar state was one of his ardent devotees. He has written several books and some of his compositions are recited daily by Datta devotees.

13. PANTMAHARAJ BALEKUNDRIKAR

There is a village called Balekundri about twelve kilometres east of Belgaum now in north Karnataka. There is an ancient temple of Rameshwar and some lakes here. Pantmaharaj was born in the family of the village Kulkarni (village clerk), a pious and duty conscious family for generations. His real name was Dattatreya and was the eldest of the six sons of Ramchandrapant Kulkarni. He also had six sisters.



Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar

Pantmaharaj was born in September 1855 at his maternal grandfather's home in Daddi, a village in the same district on the banks of the Ghatprabha River. Daddi is located among hills in beautiful surroundings and thus Pantmaharaj grew up in an atmosphere of natural beauty. His early years were spent at Daddi with his maternal uncle Shripadpant. His uncle taught him to respect truth, honour all that is good and holy, maintain good moral and courteous behaviour towards others and shun evil through the medium of stories from Puranas and other religious literature. Piety and devotion were in his blood from both sides of his family therefore he grew up in an atmosphere of high moral standards.

His uncle saw to his early education which was in Marathi. At the age of fourteen he came to Belgaum for studying in the English high school. His family at that time was poor. But being a person of determination, in spite of the many difficulties caused by the poverty Pantmaharaj passed the matriculation examination as well as the public service examination. While he was studying in Belgaum his father, himself a devotee of Shri Dattatreya, made him read books like Gurucharitra, Dattamahatmya etc. related to Dattatreya tradition and impressed upon him the importance of devotion in life. That was how his devotion to Shri Dattatreya became well founded at a very young age and he became a seeker.

After he passed his matriculation examination, he worked as a teacher in an English school. He called his younger brothers one by one to Belgaum and arranged for their school education. In 1882 he was married to his maternal uncle's daughter. Three years later when his father Ramchandrapant died the burden of maintaining the family fell entirely on him but in whatever little income he had he not only managed to maintain his family but helped in the education of the children of his friends and relatives as well as children of poor people. He not only looked after the education of these children but oversaw their moral character and behaviour also. His wife was co-operative and so were his brothers. In 1890 his younger brother started earning and that eased the financial situation considerably. While he was in service he used to spend the evening hours in discussions on Vedanta with people who visited him and in *Bhajan* at night. He resigned his job in 1903 and spent the subsequent two years in quiet meditation. In 1904 his wife died. His detachment was such as to make him remark that Guru asked him to marry and Guru had relieved him of the burden. Pantmaharaj himself passed away a year and a half later in October 1905 at the age of fifty-one at Belgaum. His disciples and devotees took his body in a giant procession to Balekundri and cremated in the mango orchard there. An Oudumber tree was planted there as a memorial.

Pantmaharaj's Guru was a great yogi named Balappa or Balavadhut who had renounced the world and was living in the hills of Kardiguddi near Balekundri. He met his Guru through his cousin and uncle who were disciples of Balavadhut. In the course of time Balavadhut realised the worth of Pantmaharaj, passed on to him the secret knowledge he himself had received from his own Guru Ramavadhut. After making Pantmaharaj his successor in the matters of management of his sect he went to Shri Shailam never to return. According to Pantmaharaj, Shri Dattatreya, Shripad Shrivallabha, Shri Narasimha Saraswati and his own Guru Balavdhuta are the same. Shri Dattatreya seat is in the heart of his devotees. The experience of oneness with him can be achieved only through the path of love. His path is known as Avadhuta path. The beliefs held by followers of this path are:

"*Sadguru* accepts us with all our sins and merits. Once he accepts us all are equal and we are no longer affected by our actions i.e. we do not have to enjoy or suffer their consequences. We see our *sadguru* everywhere, in Hindu, as well in other religions. We are "Raj yogis", i.e. we don't torture our bodies by strenuous fasts, complicated *pujas* or long penance but we stick to our custom and do all the rites as prevalent in our society, remembering our Sadguru every time. Sadguru has emphasized His teachings by showing the God in us, which is same in everyone, in spite of his deeds. Sadguru is like a "*Kalpataru*" (the mythical wish tree, which grants all the wishes). He always looks after his true disciple."

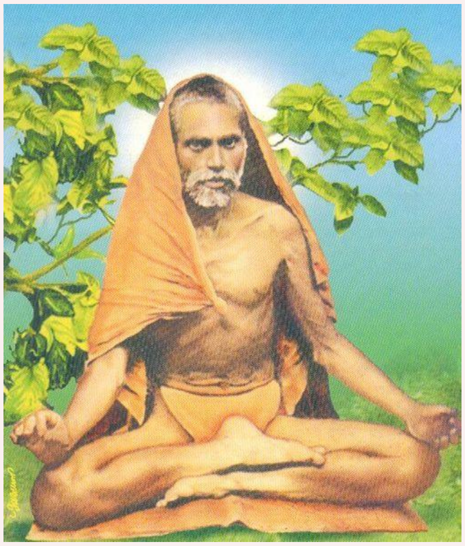
One has to abandon pride and ego, observe brotherhood and equality beyond gender, caste and creed and avoid ritualism. One should enjoy peace in the heart with belief in *Adwaita*. Pantmaharaj insists that good health should be maintained through proper diet, control of mind, behaviour and speech. One should desire for good. Avadhuta path is superior to Vedanta path because nothing binds you and liberation has no value because both are unreal. It is a path of pure devotion and love, unqualified love for peace, instead of dogmatic knowledge and is open to all whether irrespective of caste and gender. Guru takes care of everything.

His Ashram at Balekundri near Belgaum exudes peace. A visit to this Ashram is very refreshing and the treatment a visitor gets there proves the power of the teachings of Pantmaharaj.

Pantmaharaj knew many languages: English, Marathi, Kannada, Hindi and Sanskrit and was well read in the spiritual literature in these languages. Many *Shastris*, pundits used to come to him to get their difficulties explained. Because of his wide reading as well as his own spiritual standing he could easily satisfy them. He has composed more than three thousand poems in the praise of Shri Dattatreya incorporating the Adwaita (monism) philosophy. For him Shri Pantmaharaj did not see any difference between Guru and God or Guru and Dattatreya. He wrote in Marathi as well as Kannada. The collection of his poems is published as Shri Datta Prem Lahari (Waves of love for Shri Dattatreya). An audio-tape of his songs is also available and is worth listening. His various other writings have also been published.

14. SHRI VASUDEVANANDA SARASWATI

Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati or Tembeswami has made a deep mark in Datta-parampara. The credit for locating the birthplaces of Shripad Shrivallabha and Narasimha Saraswati and developing them and carrying the Datta-parampara to Gujarat goes to him. He travelled a lot spending the four month *Chaturmas* period during the monsoon season at various holy places. Wherever he went aspirants gathered around him and many became his disciples. Thus he has disciples over a wide geographical area. Some well-known devotees were Rangavdhut Maharaj, Ganda Maharaj and Gulawani Maharaj. We shall read about these saints later. He was a very learned person.



Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami)

Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati belongs to the orthodox class of Datta devotees and probably the most orthodox of them all. One may notice that most of the Datta devotees mentioned so far come from the Deccan plateau part of Maharashtra and Karnataka states. Tembeswami comes from Konkan, the coastal part of Maharashtra.

He was the son of Ganeshbhat Tembe and Ramabai, both ardent Datta devotees. They lived in Mangaon, a village near Sawantwadi (a princely state in the pre-independence era) north of and adjoining Goa. Ganeshbhat had spent many years in Ganagapur for worship of Shri Dattatreya and became very detached towards the worldly affairs. He sought to become a sanyasi but was instructed in a dream by Shri Datta-

treya to complete his family duties first. He returned home, resumed his family life. The son Vasudeva was born to him on August 13, 1854. The family subsisted on income from priestly duties which did not suffice to make the ends meet. Vasudeva's grandfather Haribhat had to resort to farming for additional income. Grandfather Haribhat was his main support because his father Ganeshbhat had left home to live in Ganagapur leaving the domestic affairs to his brother who unfortunately looked after his own interests better.

Vasudeva was a very intelligent child with a sharp memory. He could remember anything that he heard just once. His grandfather started Vasudeva's education at the age of five. By the age of twelve Vasudeva had already finished learning and *Shastras* under the guidance of Shri Tatya Bhataji Ukidave. He studied astrology under a well known master called Shambhushastri Sadhale. His grasp of the subject was so good that once when a person came to Shambhushastri for finding an auspicious time for rituals connected with entering a new house, Vasudeva disagreed with his teacher's recommendation because he found that what his teacher had calculated was actually a very inauspicious moment. He was bold enough to tell this to his teacher who was enraged to see himself proved wrong and immediately terminated his relations with Vasudeva. The details of this encounter became well-known in the village and people started consulting Vasudeva now realizing his capability, sincerity and love for truth

Vasudeva was a well-behaved person. From childhood he had a detached nature and used to be quite austere in his behaviour e.g. he used to bathe and perform *Sandhya* thrice daily as prescribed for Brahmins, recite Gayatri mantra 1000 times, read Gurucharitra and followed the religious disciplines prescribed in it for Brahmins. He only took fresh, *sattvik* (pure) vegetarian food prepared by himself or by his mother after the usual offerings to sacrificial fire ((*Vaishvadev*), the cow (*Gogras*) and the crow (*Kakabali*). If during the meal any impurity in the occurred (according to *smritis*) like hearing the voice of a woman under menstrual cycle he would leave his food and fast for the day. Observance of fast on Ekadashi (11^{th} day of lunar calendar) was very strict, without even taking a drop of water. He never used to wear shoes, not even wear sandals or use umbrella.

As a result of his austerities and religious practices he soon acquired *mantrasiddhi* i.e. occult power through mantras. To give an interesting example of this power, once he was travelling on foot to the nearby village with a fellow priest when they saw a snake going ahead of them. The companion asked Vasudeva whether his mantra would work on it. Vasudeva took a little dust and reciting a mantra sprinkled it in a circle around the snake. The snake could not cross the boundary of the circle however much it tried. The duo went ahead to the village, finished their work and returned home forgetting all about the snake. Next afternoon Vasudeva suddenly remembered and returned to the spot with his friend. The snake was lying exhausted within the circle. Vasudeva released the snake with an antidote mantra but felt so much repentance for troubling an innocent creature that he never used it again. Another time he tamed a wild cow at his sister's place by a mantra. Once he helped local police by providing an accurate description and modus operandi of a particularly evasive gang of robbers. He used to helped people in distress by relieving them of their chronic ailments. But he never used his powers for monetary gains. He was by now so much respected that people called him respectfully as Shri Vasudeva Shastri.

Vasudeva was married much against his wish. He married at the age of twenty-one to Annapurna, daughter of Babasaheb Gode from neighbouring Sawantwadi. She was rather plain looking with defective foot, but of a good-natured person and devoted to her husband. She herself had a detached nature and her spiritual status was also high for she used to easily go into trance. Annapurna never got along well with her mother-in-law. Vasudeva's mother used to inflict a lot of verbal and at times corporal abuse on her. Vasudeva Shastri though he sympathized with his wife never uttered a word in his wife's defense out of devotion for his mother whom he did not wish to offend. Annapurna felt neglected and sometimes would rebel by not cooperating in the various religious rituals, which formed an integral part of such a major portion of her husband's life. He even tried to become a sanyasi but was advised that it was not the right time.

The basic detachment in his nature increased due to a domestic incident. Once on the day after Ganesh Chaturthi he found that the preparations for the daily worship were not properly done. He remarked about this to his wife. But this enraged his mother who had an irritable nature and did not get along well with her daughter-in-law. Her angry talk saddened Vasudeva who immediately concluded the Ganesh Chaturthi celebration that day itself instead of the usual five days. Noting that treating his mother like God as told in the Shastras is futile he came to the conclusion that worldly life is difficult. Contemplating on God only can lead to happiness. One day a Brahmin came in his dream and instructed him to go to Narsobawadi. He had no money for undertaking the journey but fortunately he received a fee of two and half rupees as fees from a client for a horoscope which enabled him to go to Narsobawadi. Vasudevashastri was about twenty-six years of age now.

Initiation by Shri Dattatreya At Narasobawadi he met a great spiritual person named Govindaswami who arranged for his stay. Eventually he requested Govindaswami to initiate him as his disciple by giving *mantra* but Govindaswami refused saying that he was not the right person for him and a proper person would give him the *mantra* at proper time. That night around midnight, with the intention of sitting for *japa* (rosary or continuous repetition of a deity name or *mantra*) he washed his feet in the nearby River Krishna and came to the temple of Shri Narasimha Saraswati Padukas. But seeing the door closed he decided to leave after a *pradakshina* (circumambulation). Just then he saw a tall effulgent person in ochre clothes and made his obeisance to him. The person asked Vasudevashastri who he was and what he was doing there when there was a rule that after the last *Arati* nobody should visit the temple. Vasudevashastri replied that he was new there and did not know the rules and that he would not do so again. Once more he made a *namaskar* with folded hands and suddenly the person vanished. Vasudevashastri realised a little late that this must have been Shri Dattatreya himself. That night at dawn Shri Dattatreya came in his dream and gave him the *mantra*. Next day onwards he set for himself the routine of worship of Shri Dattatreya and meditating on him followed by the study of the Upanishads. Later he was instructed, again in a vision, to practice yoga as an aid in Self-realization and to obtain a particular book on yoga from a certain Brahmin in Sawantwadi also informing where he would be found.

He was later instructed to return to Mangaon with an assurance that Shri Dattatreya would always be with him. On the way back to Mangaon he was presented an idol of Shri Dattatreya by a goldsmith. He built a small temple in Mangaon to install it. Now he set on a new routine of worship and meditation, living on alms of uncooked food. He used to cook whatever grains he received without adding spices or salt and eat it after making its offering to God first. Slowly local people also started coming to the temple for worship. Vasudevashastri remained in Mangaon for seven years. During this period he was inspired to translate the famous Marathi book Gurucharitra in Sanskrit so that it can be read all over India.

Annapurna became pregnant but his mother did not like it was nasty to her. Vasudeva Shastri was pained at this and was wondering what to do when one day he was instructed by Shri Dattatreya to leave Mangaon that day itself with his wife taking along the idol also. He packed up and asked his wife to leave behind everything except her *mangalsutra*. They left carrying only the idols and one change of clothes and reached Sawantwadi an hour later. Vasudeva Shastri did not eat food cooked by others so he cooked his own meal after begging and his wife took her lunch at the house of Ukidaveshastri. Then they proceeded to Narsobawadi. This was in 1889. Vasudeva Shastri was now known as Buwa.

At Narsobawadi Buwa met Shri Govind Swami and Shri Mouni Swami and settled in the *Dharmashala*. In due course Annapurna gave birth to a stillborn child.

Sanyasa On receiving instructions from Shri Dattatreya he left Narasobawadi with his wife and went north from. In 1891 his wife died while they were at Gangakhed. On the thirteenth day after her death Vasudevashastri opted for *sanyasa* and was initiated by a *sanyasi* on the banks of Godavari. Next he was ordered to proceed to Ujjani and receive the monastic *danda* (sceptre) from Shri Narayananand Saraswa-

ti. Now we shall now call him Swamiji. Swamiji was ordered by Shri Dattatreya to go on foot as he had always done, to Ujjani *via* Washim, Umarkhed, Mahur, Khandwa, Badhawai, Onkareshwar, Mandaleshwar and Balwada. Staying in a Datta temple in Ujjaini, he went to Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj and solicited the sceptre. Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj ritually presented the sceptre to Shri Swamiji and bestowed upon him the Yogpatta (monastic name) of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati. That day, on repeated entreaties of his Guru Swamiji partook of the food at the monastery, thus violating the Shri Dattatreya's Lord's orders. As a result, he started continuous vomiting which ceased only after Shri Narayananand Swami prayed Shri Dattatreya and asked for His forgiveness. Throughout Swamiji's life, he had to strictly obey the Divine orders and any deviation invited punishment from the Lord. Swamiji spent his first Chaturmaas with his monastic guru at Ujjani that year. Thus began the itinerancy of Swamiji. The purpose of his life was revealed to him by Lord Dattatreya when he ordered him to travel all over India and preach the Sanatan Vedic path and bring back the people gone astray from it. He traversed the country for the next 23 years following strictly the harsh discipline of the Sanyas Ashram. Throughout this phase he used to receive instructions from Shri Dattatreya about doing certain things and was punished if he did not obey them, something like father and son. He always avoided cities.

He hardly had any possessions. He only carried His possessions included 4 loincloths, 2 robes, the sceptre, a Kamandalu (wooden or bamboo water vessel), occasionally a woollen cloth, a book of Upanishads, a case of worship utensils, two idols of Datta and a cord to draw water and again occasionally some paper and writing materials. He had no other belongings. He washed his clothes and utensils himself and never accepted anyone's service or anyone's touch. If anybody touched him, he used to take a bath. Similarly, he used to take a bath every time he passed stools.

Samadhi Swamiji spent his final days at Garudeshwar in Gujarat. He took samadhi sitting before the idol of Shri Dattatreya, in 1914 at Garudeshwar, where he had stayed for a longer time towards the end. His body was then left in the river Narmada. He was ill during his final days but he refused to take any medicine because he never gave any importance to the body.

Even though he himself was orthodox this never came in the way of helping people from other communities including Muslims. He had many disciples, prominent among them were Gandamaharaj, Rangavadhut, both from Gujarat and Gulawani Maharaj from Pune. The latter has collected and published Swamiji's writings.

15. RANGAVADHUT MAHARAJ

Rangavadhut was a disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami). He is one of the main forces behind the strengthening of Datta-parampara in Gujarat. He was born in 1898 and was named Pandurang. His father Vithalpant Valame had migrated from a village in Ratnagiri district in Konkan to serve as a priest in the Vithal temple belonging to one Sakharampant Sarpotdar at Godhra in Gujarat. His mother's name was Rukmini. He had a brother named Narayan younger than him by two and a half years.

Pandurang was of enquiring mind from childhood. Once he saw a funeral procession and pestered his father with questions about life and death and how to get rid of the problem of life and death. To the last question his father answered him that the name Shri Rama gets rid of the problem. This answer made a deep mark on him.

Unfortunately, Vithalpant died of plague when Pandurang was only five years old, leaving the burden of the two children on Rukminibai. She returned to her mother's place at Devale in Ratnagiri district. After his thread ceremony at the age of eight his mother took him to Narsobawadi where he met Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) who, as soon as he saw the boy said, "Oh, this boy belongs to me." When Pandurang heard this he prostrated at the feet of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. That started his

spiritual path and back home he started regularly reading Gurucharitra, a copy of which was available with his maternal uncle. On material plane he had the responsibility of his mother and younger brother.

Pandurang was intelligent and knew Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Sanskrit and English well. He studied up to B.A., but before he could appear for exam he came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi and joined his Gujarat Vidyapith and later Navajeevan Prakashan, a publishing institute founded by Gandhiji. He wrote on nationalist topics in the journal "Navajeevan", but his heart was in the spiritual field. He waited until his younger brother Narayan was old enough to take care of himself and their mother. Then with mother's permission he left home for spiritual pursuits. His original intention was to go to the Himalayas. Before going there he met many saints. A saint named Dhuniwale Dada suggested, implying it as a divine wish that he should to go to the jungles of Narmada. He came to Baroda where Mouni Maharaj, a disciple of Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot gave him more exact instructions to go to Nareshwar on the banks of Narmada in Gujarat. He found the place with the help of his friend Daskaka. It is a holy place with a historical Shivalinga supposed to have been installed by Shri Ganesha himself. That was the year 1924 in the bitter December cold when Pandurang alighted from the train at Nareshwar Road station (known then as Malod). Walking in the dark night he reached the Nareshwar temple which was in a thick jungle in those days, full of poisonous snakes, scorpions and wild animals. The place was used for cremation and people were afraid to go there even in daytime. Today the place is totally changed with modern amenities for the pilgrims.

He settled under the *neem* (*margosa*) tree in front of the temple. Later, Daskaka visited him and built a small room for him and named it Dattakutir. Surviving on whatever alms came to him he started a course of one hundred and eight readings of Dattapurana written by his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. He did not have money for the concluding rituals (*Udyapan*) but was instructed by his Guru the equivalent task to finish the circumambulation (*pradakshina*) of Narmada in one hundred and eight days. Before setting upon the task he got the intuitive message that he should go to south. He did so and met Gandamaharaj, another disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati, who had also received a message that a young acolyte will come to him. Gandamaharaj, himself a Gujarati, had written "Gurumurti Charitra Grantha", a biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in Marathi. The two disciples met and the task of correcting and polishing the biography was assigned to Pandurang. Pandurang then started his task of circumambulation of Narmada from Omkar walking 25-50 miles daily through the difficult jungles and hilly territory. As desired by his Guru he completed the circumambulation in 108 days.

After return, he finished editing the "Gurumurti Charitra Grantha" and had it printed at Bharuch where he himself wrote a short biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati consisting of 108 *shlokas*. He then returned to Nareshwar.

By now he was well known by the name Rangavadhut and many devotees came to him. Slowly Nareshwar developed from a forest place to a town. His mother came to live with him in 1935. She was accompanied by Narayan who was ill and passed away soon after. Slowly, Dattamandir and Dharmashala (rest house) were built. Regular routines of rituals of worship were established with special rituals related to Shri Dattatreya e.g. Dattajayanti, Gurupurnima, Gurudwadashi etc., and the birthday of Shri Rangavadhut on particular days. The devotees poured lot of money for developing Nareshwar but the mode of living for Rangavadhut himself was a strictly detached austerity. His only possession was his loincloth and he disliked handling money. Rangavadhut Maharaj liked to travel to neighbouring villages so that others also could meet him and thus he could keep the devotional spirit alive in the people there. But because his mother did not keep good health he used to go only with her consent. In 1950, accompanied by many disciples, he went to Ganagapur, Narsobawadi, Akkalkot, Oudumber etc. and also to Mangaon, the place of birth of his Guru, where he celebrated Dattajayanti on a grand scale. In 1967 he went to Nairobi, Campala etc. in Africa on the invitation of the devotees there. He was in Africa for about six months. That was just before his mother died and after returning from Africa he observed the first annual *Shraddha* ceremony when

thousands of people were served meals on the occasion. At Nareshwar his activities went beyond spiritual. He arranged medical camps for the residents of the neighbourhood. In 1968 he left Nareshwar to visit Hardwar and never returned.

During his Hardwar pilgrimage he took only four or five people with him. After visiting many holy places, he gave meals to many Sadhus at Hardwar. On 19th November 1968 he complained of some pain in the throat and left his body. The trustees of Nareshwar establishment brought the body to Ahmedabad by plane and then by a decorated truck to Nareshwar where the body was cremated after appropriate ceremonies.

Rangavadhut Maharaj wrote many books. He is known for his Dattabavani, a brief poem of fifty-two *shlokas* in Gujarathi in the praise of Shri Dattatreya.

16. GANDAMAHARAJ

Real name of Gandamaharaj was Keshavaram Desai, a Gujarathi Brahmin from Talangpur in Surat District in Gujarat. He had studied only up to fourth standard. He was strongly bent towards spiritual path. His behaviour from childhood was incoherent like a mad person and was therefore known as Ganda meaning an idiot. His father got him married in the hope that responsibility would cure him but it was of no avail. He left home and wandered all over India in search of a Guru and finally met him near Surat, at Shinor situated on the banks of Naramda, in Bharuch district of Gujarat. The Guru was Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati who, recognising the spiritual flame in him, said, “Ao Ganda” meaning “Come Idiot”. Being called by his pet name by a total stranger surprised him. When Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati heard his story he told him, “Ganda, your parents are old and your wife is without support. You go back to your home, take care of your wife and parents and that is your present duty.” He permitted Ganda to meet him anytime whenever he was in Gujarat. Ganda reluctantly returned home but after a few days he was free of the responsibilities and he returned to his Guru who gave him shelter and guidance. After some time he was worthy enough to be initiated as a *sanyasi* and was renamed Yogananda Saraswati, but people called him Gandamaharaj. Though a Gujarati, he wrote the biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in Marathi, which was later edited by Rangavadhut as told earlier. On instructions of his Guru, Gandamaharaj left Gujarat and set up his *ashram* at Gunj on the banks of river Godavari in Maharashtra. He spent his time in spiritual pursuit and finally took samadhi at Gunj. Anniversary of his samadhi is celebrated regularly at Gunj.

17. DATTAMAHARAJ ASHTEKAR

His birth name was Narahari Vasudeo Diwan. He was a Deshastha Brahmin from the town of Buvache Wathar near Kolhapur. The Samadhi of Saint Eknath’s grandson Uddhavaswami is situated in this village. His mother Muktabai also was a descendant of Saint Eknath. He was born in 1894 and was the third child of Mr. Vasudeo Diwan who passed away when Narahari was eleven years old. He studied up to fifth standard of Marathi in a place called Shirale. At the age of thirteen he left home to go to Narsobawadi but telling his family that he was going in search of a job to Sangli. In Narsobawadi he met Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) and felt a spiritual inspiration rising within him. After a few days he felt an impulse to go to Ganagapur. At Ganagapur, Narahari lived on alms and served Shri Dattatreya through daily worship etc. During his stay at Ganagapur he had an attack of cholera and was on the verge of death when Shri Dattatreya appeared before him, told him not to be afraid and himself poured into Narahari’s mouth some *tirtha* (holy water). Instructing him to return home after he recovered Shri Dattatreya disappeared. This encounter with Shri Dattatreya caused his mind to turn inwards. As per the instructions Narahari returned to Buvache Wathar and served at the samadhi of Uddhavaswami for some years. Later he went to Pandharpur where he met a great saint called Shri Harihar Maharaj. The latter initiated him as his disciple and both went on a pilgrimage of the Jyotirlingas and then to Girnar. At Girnar they met Shri Dat-

tatreya. Shri Harihar Maharaj then dispatched Narahari to study yoga under Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami). Here he achieved Self-realization.

In 1918 he received instructions to circumambulate Krishna River on foot. The river originates in a temple at Mahabaleshwar (now a holiday resort) in Western Ghats and meets the Bay of Bengal at Macchalipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Certain restrictions are required to be observed in this task like not going farther than eight kilometres from the river and taking bath in the river daily. In many places no trodden path exists and one has to traverse thick jungles infested with wild animals. The total journey from source to the mouth and back is more than 2500 kilometres but when the instructions come from Almighty He also sees them through. Narahari finished his task successfully and felt completely satisfied. He returned to Ganagapur where Shri Dattatreya appeared to him in person and he was in the state of samadhi for seven days. In the course of time Narahari began to be called Dattamaharaj.

He then went on a pilgrimage to southern part of India and after visiting many holy places reached Tanjore in 1920 where he camped in a *math*. He read a lot of spiritual books like Upanishads and Tantra. He used to experience Self-realization while reading a particular book and realised that there was no knowledge beyond Self-realization. In Tanjore he gave spiritual guidance to many people. He also met a Videhi person, (i.e. an advanced Self-realised person who is oblivious of the bodily affairs) in whose company Dattamaharaj enjoyed the bliss of the Self and his concentration was sharpened to such an extent that he had no awareness of the surrounding world or of time.

Dattamaharaj returned to Buwache Wathar in 1923, emaciated, with long hair and beard, dressed only in a loincloth, carrying only a cloth, bed sheet and Kamandalu (the wooden tumbler) as his only material possessions but with peace and love evident in the eyes. After morning bath and *sandhya*, he would sit in deep meditation for three hours. It is said that while in this state he would often float a few centimetres above his seat. As prescribed for *sanyasis*, he would go for alms at mid-day. He also read the book Dattamahatmya daily. Later he went to Ashte near Sangli where he gave spiritual advice to many seekers. He did not initiate any disciples, but he could know by intuition the spiritual worth of a person and shower his grace on him without initiation. In 1926, on the sixth day of bright fortnight in the lunar month of Falgun, after the evening worship, Dattamaharaj sat in samadhi keeping people away and by yogic process left his body. Leaving the body through samadhi is not legal in modern times and it took some time before people could get post-facto permission and take further action about post-death rituals customary for a yogi. His body was buried along with his *kamandalu* and copy of Dattamahatmya.

18. NARAYAN MAHARAJ KEDGAONKAR

Narayan Maharaj was born in 1885 at Bagalkot (Bijapur District in Karnataka state) in a family of Datta devotees. His father Bhimrao and mother Lakshmi died when he was a child. He was brought up by his grandmother at Nargund. From childhood itself Narayan liked to meditate and attend *Bhajans* and *Kirtans*. He even used to go to a cave at Nargund in order to meditate without disturbance. He was fortunate to get spiritual guidance from one Shridharbhat Ghate at Nargund. This included *Suryanamaskar* (Obeisance to Sun with physical exercise similar to push-ups), *japa* of Gayatri Mantra, reading Gurucharitra etc., besides the daily rituals prescribed for a Brahmin. Unfortunately he had to leave his grandmother's house due to domestic problems and live the life of a wanderer at a tender age of ten. During his travels he received blessings from Siddharudha Swami in Hubli. He then came to Belgaum where he received initiation from Shri Vidyananda Swami of Belapur. Narayanmaharaj then came to Arvi near Pune. Wherever he went he used his occult powers to help people. Now he received divine instructions to go to Ganagapur. By now people had experienced his occult powers and he had many devotees. A rich landlord helped him to go to Ganagapur where he remained engrossed in the service of Shri Dattatreya. Later he returned to Arvi and from there to Supe where he built a small hut on an island and lived there. On this island he found Shri Dattatreya Padukas under an *Oudumber* tree. He had many more devotees by now and was

now called Narayan Maharaj. Since for reaching the island one had to get down at Kedgaon station people started calling him Narayan Maharaj Kedgaonkar.

One day, Mr. Wodehouse, principal of the Deccan College Pune had gone on the island for hunting. He met there Narayan Maharaj who produced water at the spot indicated by him. This impressed Mr. Wodehouse so much that he published the account of this miracle in newspapers. Because of this his fame spread far and wide. People began visiting Kedgaon in numbers. By now an establishment devoted to Datta worship was established and became well developed on the island. In 1913 an idol of Shri Dattatreya was installed. Narayan Maharaj went on pilgrimage to northern holy places including Nepal where he received large gifts and donations. His occult powers impressed wherever he went. On return he started a new era of performing worship rituals which attracted many towards Datta worship. In 1942-43 he became anaemic and weak. After his sixty-first birthday in 1945 he decided to go to Ootacamund for recuperation and he came down to Bangalore where he performed the *Atirudra* ceremony at the Mallikarjuna temple. When the Brahmins had sat for their meals at the end of the ceremony, Narayan Maharaj decided that the ceremony was over and he left his body. He was cremated there itself and his ashes were brought and installed at Kedgaon. Thus ended the sojourn of a great Datta devotee who left many devotees behind.

Narayan Maharaj used to speak little and was very humble and polite. Even the British used to revere him. Purohitswami (see later) tells of his experience when he met him in Mumbai as follows. Narayan Maharaj had camped in the house of a danseuse. People began to criticize but he never bothered. That house later became an ashram due to the holy presence of the great saint. When Purohitwami went to meet him there was another visitor, a high court pleader who was completely drunk. He vomited and spoilt the saint's clothes but while everybody else present there was annoyed Narayan Maharaj did not get angry and instead continued blessing him. The pleader later became an ardent devotee of Narayan Maharaj.

19. BALAMUKUNDA SARASWATI

The story of Balmukunda Saraswati (Kolhapur) is an interesting example how the higher powers operate. In Kolhapur there was a pious and learned Brahmin named Naraharishastri Pathak. He was well read in the Vedas and other Shastras like astrology. He was an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya. With the intention of having a vision of Shri Dattatreya he set upon the task of reading Gurucharitra 151 times. His faith and dedication bore fruits because after 108 readings itself he had the vision of Shri Dattatreya who offered a boon. The boon Naraharshastri asked was that the service to Shri Dattatreya should continue in his family. Shri Dattatreya was pleased and told him that he would take birth in his family and that he need not continue with the remaining 43 readings which would be completed by his grandson. His son Vamanrao continued the pious tradition and to Vamanrao was born Ganesh the father of Balamukunda Saraswati. Ganesh's mother died when he was five months old and soon after his grandfather also died. Ganesh studied the Vedas and Shastras and continued the family tradition. He married but his wife died soon after marriage. This made Ganesh detached towards the world. He left home with the intention of taking *sanyasa*. He wandered to Belgaum where he met Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar to whom he requested to be taken as a disciple telling him about his intention to take *sanyasa*. You have read about Pantmaharaj earlier and how his Guru Shri Balappa or Balavadhut went to Shri Shailam and never returned. Shri Balappa came in Pantmaharaj's dream and instructed him not to initiate Ganeshshastri and to send him back to his home. He also told that he himself (i.e. Balappa) had been instructed by Shri Dattatreya to be reborn as Ganeshshastri's son. Accordingly Pantmaharaj asked him to return to Kolhapur advising him to do his worldly duties first. Ganeshshastri returned and married again, his second wife's name being Saraswati.

Ganeshshastri had ten sons but none survived. Ganeshshastri became sad at this bad luck and was thinking of leaving everything to go on a pilgrimage when Shri Pantmaharaj came in his dream and asked him

to complete the remaining 43 readings of Gurucharitra assuring him that his bad days were over and Shri Dattatreya would take birth in his family. Accordingly a son was born to him in 1907 and was named Anant but was later called Mukund. The boy could not sit, walk or speak until he was four. Doctors also did not give any hopes. The parents were worried. Then one day Shri Dattatreya came in Ganeshshastri's dream and asked him to perform seven more readings of Gurucharitra. After that the boy not only became normal but he also became the leader of the children while at play.

One day Mukund told his father how he had taken birth in his family. Next day he left his home to live with his devotee to whom he had promised (in earlier life) he would live with her. Her name was Akkubai. She lived in a part of Kolhapur known as Shahupuri. Mukund came to Akkubai's door shouting, "Here I come, mother!" and when she opened the door she found this handsome boy on her doorstep. Ganeshshastri had followed the boy to Akkubai's house and tried to take him back but the boy did not budge saying that this was his home and he was going to live there. His father had to return without him.

The story of Akkubai is quite strange. She used to live with her husband and two daughters in Panhala, a fort once governed by Shivaji the Great, about 15 Km from Kolhapur. Her husband was a Gurav (a non-brahmin priest who looks after the daily worship in a temple) who fell into bad habits and began torturing her. Not able to tolerate it she attempted suicide by drowning in the nearby lake. As she was about to jump, Shi Swami Samarth appeared there asking her not to do so and to meet Shri Krishna Saraswati at Kolhapur. But how to reach Kolhapur? There were no buses in those days. Just then a bullock cart came and gave her lift to Kolhapur. It was being driven by Sadhubaba, a Muslim fakir who lived in about 700 AD and has his *darga* (samadhi of a Muslim saint) nearby. On the way she stopped for food at the bridge on the river Panchaganga. Just then a mendicant approached her and asked for food. She was hesitating to give him her food because she was not a Brahmin but he accepted it. When she asked his name he turned out to be Shri Krishna Saraswati, the very person she was going to meet. Shri Krishna Saraswati took her under her protection and that is how she came to live in Kolhapur with her daughters. She lived first by selling vegetables and later milk. A saint named Dhondibuva had told her one day that Avadhut (Shri Dattatreya) would come and live with her but at that time she did not understand its meaning. He had also told her not to go after money but she did not listen to him and later suffered losses.

She came to her mentor Shri Krishna Saraswati for explanation but he laughed and said that what had happened was good and she should not forget Shri Dattatreya. One day Shri Krishna Saraswati came to her home and threw out all her possessions leaving her only two dresses and a blanket and telling her to remember Shri Dattatreya constantly, for he was going to come and live with her. She began waiting for that day and when Balmukund came she realised it had come. She prayed to Ganeshshastri to let the child stay promising to take complete care of him adding that these are the connections of earlier lives. Ganeshshatri was nonplussed but let the boy stay. Perhaps there is no other situation like this in the lives of parents anywhere.

Ganeshshastri's wife would sometimes insist to bring Mukund home and when he saw Mukund eating from the hands of a non-Brahmin he used feel pained. Such a thing was unheard of and taboo in those days. One day the boy insisted that Ganeshshastri also should eat that food. Ganeshshastri became angry and refused as it was against the rules. But Mukund made him sit down by the side of Akkubai and kept one hand on her head and the other on the father's head. And then the father saw light and waves of bliss and began seeing Mukund everywhere and in everything. There were no caste differences anywhere. Everything was only light. Ganeshshastri confessed he was ignorant and had experienced what the Vedas have described. Then the three had meals together. Sometime later, Mukund did visit his mother at her insistence for a short while. She passed away soon after.

Ganeshshastri left for Varanasi against the advice of Mukund and being fed up with the world tried to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges. But some unseen hands brought him to the shore. It was Mu-

kund who took him to the Vishveshwara temple in Varanasi where he saw that there was no duality between Mukund and Shiva. Mukund suddenly vanished and Ganeshshastri returned to Kolhapur.

Akkubai made improvements in her house spending whatever money she had and turned it into a Math. By now Mukund was known as Balmukund Saraswati and was recognized as an avatar of Shri Dattatreya though there were people who did not believe so. He brought many to his fold and guided them, helped to remove material problems of his devotees and performed many miracles in the process. Balmukund Saraswati left his body in 1957. His samadhi which exudes is at the Walawalkar Estate, Udyamnagar in Kolhapur. Members of the Walawalkar family were ardent devotees of Shri Balmukund Saraswati. A free dispensary is being run at the place where his samadhi is situated.

20. PUROHITSWAMI

It has been mentioned earlier that there are just a handful of autobiographies by saints and Purohitswami's book "An Indian Monk" is one of them. It gives an insight into the conditions of birth, childhood and



Shri Purohitswami

further spiritual progress of a saint. As Shri Krishna tells Arjuna (Dnyaneswari or Bhagwadgita Ch 6),

"Arjuna, can there be anything other than liberation for one who longs for it? He is merely taking rest for some time, and even during that rest period there is such a happiness which even gods do not gain. Had he practiced yoga then he would have attained liberation before death. But because of lack of speed he had to stop in the middle; but liberation is reserved for him. (6:437-440). He reaches with ease the planes which even Indra the king of Gods finds it difficult to attain. But he gets sick of the incomparable enjoyments on these planes and says all the time, 'Oh God! Why are there impediments in my path to liberation?' Then he returns to the earth to be born in a religious family and starts gaining spiritual wealth. People in such family observe morals, speak clearly and truthfully and behave as prescribed in the Scriptures. (6:441-445). Vedas are the living deity for them, their actions are guided by *Swadharma* and discrimination, thoughts of God alone enter their minds and their wealth is their family deity. The person happily is born here on the strength of his meritorious deeds. (6:446-448). Or he is reborn into the family of a yogi of high level. Even as a child he is already loaded with knowledge because of his past. Due to his mature intellect he knows all branches of knowledge easily. (6:451-454). His intellect develops further from the point of his death in the earlier lifetime and he is able to grasp mysterious subjects and even difficult things told by a Guru. (6:457,459). His sense-organs come under his control, mind becomes one with the *Prana* the vital life-breath and the *Prana* dissolves in the Consciousness. Somehow, yoga practice also comes easily to him and he can attain the *Samadhi State* effortlessly. (6:460-461). He attains

Siddhis even while he is an acolyte. (6:464). He is able to do his spiritual exercises effortlessly because he has reached the shores of the Self-realization after millions of years and after overcoming the impediments of thousands of births over millions of years. He gets the power of discrimination and putting that also behind in time and going beyond thought he becomes one with the Brahman. (6:465-467). He then gets that indescribable and unfathomable bliss which is beyond words. He becomes the living image of the state of the Brahman, which is the ultimate destination. (6:469-470).

The autobiography of Purohitswami bears out all this as will be seen even from his brief biography.

Birth and early childhood Purohitswami's birth name was Shankar. He was born in Badnera, situated in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra on October 12, 1882. His father Mr. Gajannan Purohit was a wealthy and religious Maharashtran Brahmin. He was a man of principles and with a basically detached nature. Gajanan's father died when he was only eight years old and his mother Akkasaheb leaving the inheritance to her stepson to avoid disputes went to live with her brother in Satara District taking young Gajanan with her. At a tender age of fifteen Gajanan took up a clerk's job in the then Great Indian Peninsular Railway (now Central Railway) and came to live at Badnera. His first two children were daughters. Gajanan prayed to Lord Shiva for the gift of a boy. His prayers were answered and he was blessed with a boy whom he name Shankar. (Two more daughters and one son followed later). He rose to become chief of administration in the GIP Railway but for health reasons left his job and settled in Amaravati working as a clerk. He was never attracted towards wealth.

Akkasaheb herself had a sound spiritual base. She was a keen devotee of Goddess Mahalakshmi. When Shankar was only eight, Akkasaheb told the family members that she was going to leave her body that afternoon. She asked her bed to be spread and lay down on it with a cloth belonging to her late husband which she had still treasured. She lay down on the bed, drank a little Ganga water and left her body calmly with the name of Goddess Mahalakshmi on her lips. Such was Shankar's (Purohitswami's) family background. Before the final moments she had called Purohitswami and with her hand on his head blessed him saying that he would realize Truth.

Right from childhood Purohitswami showed keen interest in religious festivals. His thread ceremony was performed at the age of nine after which he was entitled to carry out the regular daily rituals assigned to Brahmins. Yogis and saints always used to give him special attention for they apparently realized his spiritual status from earlier births. His father Gajanan was well read in religious literature. He was a devotee of Shri Dattatreya and used to read Gurucharitra daily. In his company Purohitswami realized that devotion to God is pure and holy by itself and one should not ask Him for petty things in life.

After passing the Matriculation exam at the age of sixteen he joined Morris College in Nagpur in Arts branch. Like his grandmother he was also attracted towards Goddess Mahalakshmi and spent nights pining for her vision. One night she did come in his dream and asked for what he wanted, but he remained tongue-tied. She kept Her blessing hand on his head and disappeared. He woke up happy now sure of Her support.

<u>Introduction to the Occult</u> He was never interested too much in studies but somehow managed to reach the final year of BA with philosophy as special subject. His professor of philosophy recognized his interest in spiritual field and advised him that the bookish knowledge of philosophy would not be useful to him and that he should consult a yogi. He then introduced Purohitswami to the Shankaracharya of Shivgangadham who was a learned person well versed in yoga. Purohitswami used to visit him every evening for some time. Later he met a sage, a person who had experienced Self-realization, who showed him the power of the *Siddhis* by coming out of a locked room and by floating above ground. He told that Purohitswami also would experience these *Siddhis* in future and would realize that Brahman is only real and the world is unreal. Then he blessed him in Shri Dattatreya's name keeping his hand of blessing on Purohitswami's head. He also told him that he was going to leave next day for Varanasi and offer his body

to the Ganges. Subsequently Purohitswami received a telegram from a disciple that he had really done so at sunrise as planned.

He began to live an austere life and slowly lost his liking for luxurious mode of living. He also realized that his so called friends were not real friends but jealous, ungrateful persons indulging in spreading all sorts of rumours about him. He remembered his father's words that: *if one wishes to attain high ideals and realize God then lesser one keeps contact with people more would it lead to ultimate happiness.* He began regular reading of Gita and Gurucharitra and practicing yoga and sitting in deep meditation. He used to observe certain austerities like sleeping without a pillow on a straw bed (made of *Darbha* grass), bathing thrice daily followed by worship and *japa*.

During vacations Purohitswami used to go in search of saints, listen attentively to their advice and serve them. He realized that each saint lived and behaved differently but he never indulged in judging them because he believed in the metaphor his father used, "When we eat a mango we never bother about the tree from which it came; whether it was a five year old tree or fifty year old, whether the tree is planted by a crook or a saint. Mango will always taste like a mango. One should just enjoy it." He also noted that these great persons never spoke ill of one another but it was their disciples who in order to show the greatness of their own Guru indulged making bad propaganda about others. He also realized common man's inability to understand teachings of such great persons due to his own limitations.

He failed in his BA examination but passed it later as an external student from Calcutta University in 1903. He then went to Pune to study law and *en route* visited many holy places of Dattatreya worship such as Narsobawadi, Oudumber and Kolhapur. At Hubli he met the great saint Siddharudha Swami who, to the surprise of his disciples, came out specially to bless him even though it was not the normal time for visitors.

For the final year of his law course he joined a college in Bombay taking a teacher's job for financial support and residing in Kalyan, a suburban town about 60 Km from Bombay. His yoga practice continued. To keep his body and mind pure he limited his diet to milk and fruits. He used to prefer *Siddhasana* posture which all big yogis use. He preferred the easily achievable Rajayoga to the Pranayama of Hathayoga which unless practiced under an able Guru can be harmful leading even to permanent damage. One day he saw Shri Dattatreya in his vision and realized that this was the deity he was pining for. But he also realized that all these deities are ultimately the same and take form according to individual mind and perception.

Meets his Guru His seriousness of the mind and inner understanding developed fast after he started worshipping Shri Dattatreya. One day while he was lying down on his grass mattress he began to cry with the thought that God was very hard hearted but probably he was not yet worthy of meeting Him. Just then one of his friends came and told him that he had come to take him to a great yogi saint who was staying with his friend. They went to a Chawl (tenement building) called Kirtikar Chawl. The yogi who was sitting on a tiger skin got up as soon as he saw Purohitswami and as their eyes met embraced Purohitswami saying, "We are meeting after many days isn't it?" Purohitswami experienced indescribable bliss in that embrace. That acquaintance was of previous births. The yogi made him sit by his side, to the utter amazement of everybody. They talked for a long time. The yogi was thin with hardly any flesh on him but very effulgent. Fragrance was emanating from him. Purohitswami could feel his strong spiritual vibrations. He assured that God was taking care of him and he would experience Him one day but he should keep patience. Then blessing him he bade farewell and Purohitswami left. Purohitswami did not know at that time that it was this friend, only four years older than himself, who was to be his Guru. This saint's name (or rather surname was Natekar, who later took the monastic name Hamsa Swami.)

Purohitswami realized that it was necessary to be regular in the yogic practice and the time should be fixed. It was no use practicing yoga for a long period one day and giving it a break the next day. He kept

aside all books including Gita but began reading Avadhuta Gita, the advice of Shri Dattatreya to Kartikswami. He also stopped visiting holy places and discussions with people. While he was preparing for his law examination he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya in the form he was worshipping him. He said, "My child, why are you going here and there? Come to me."

Visit to Girnar Immediately after he wrote the last paper of his final law examination, he went to meet his yogi friend Mr. Natekar who was preparing to go to the Girnar Mountain, the famous place associated with Shri Dattatreya. He invited Purohitswami to accompany him. They camped at a friend's house for three weeks spent in yoga practice, meditation and meeting visitors. They set forth to climb the mountain on Dattajayanti day, the day of the birth of Shri Dattatreya, which that year in 1907 fell on twenty-fifth December. Purohitswami had become weak due to his restricted diet but his friend was giving him courage. It was necessary to reach the place of Dattatreya Padukas before evening. By afternoon they reached the Gomukhi Kund, a small lake where they took a little rest in the Shiva temple. Purohitswami felt fresh after a bath in the cold lake water. While he was praying on the lake shore he saw an extremely beautiful woman standing under the Oudumber tree. She was a *yogini* who had come to meet him and give him her blessings. She reassured that by the blessings of his Guru all his wishes would be fulfilled. They reached the Dattatreya hill, their final destination just after sunset. Due to the extreme weakness Purohitswami fainted when he touched the Padukas but in that unconscious state itself he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya who again asked him to come to him and not wander here and there. He asked him to do *tapas* for attaining him. They then returned to Junagarh. Purohitswami was happy that he was accepted by Shri Dattatreya. His friend Mr. Natekar was instructed to go to mount Kailas in the Himalayas. Purohitswami set for Amaravati. *En route* he visited Shegaon, famous for the great saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj, where he met his father. Gajanan Maharaj told his father not to worry about his son.

Serves Shri Dattatreya at Mahur From Amaravati Purohitswami went to Mahur, another place associated with Shri Dattatreya. It is the place where Shri Dattatreya comes every night for sleep. First he reached Yavatmal from where, instead of taking the road, he proceeded to Mahur on foot through the jungles. After two or three days travel without food, he came to a temple at the base of a hillock. There he met an old man, the temple priest, who had been waiting for him because only the previous day he had a vision in which God told him, "My darling boy is coming tomorrow. Look after him properly." Then he asked him to take bath and freshen himself because it was time for the evening *Arati*. It was in this temple that Shri Dattatreya came to rest at night.

It was a beautiful temple, built in stone, with a large assembly hall in front. There was a small cot in one corner. He was told that this was where Shri Dattatreya rests at night. The priest joined by Purohitswami burnt incense, recited Vedic hymns and sang *arati.* He then made an offering of *naivadya* (food offering) praying Shri Dattatreya to accept it and come there for the night rest. They then spread a clean white bed sheet on the cot, a woollen Kashmiri shawl and kept a soft pillow to which rose scent was applied. Lighting incense sticks they sang *Shej-arati,* the last prayers said before deity before the deity sleeps. (Though God is formless and attributeless, for the purpose of worship a form is assigned to Him. Corresponding human attributes are also assigned and naturally it is assumed that the deity sleeps at night, gets up in the morning, cleans his or her mouth and partakes of food twice daily as man would do.) The priest then told Purohitswami, "This is the bed that you were so anxious to see. If you are fortunate then you will see Shri Dattatreya." He further assured, "He comes here every night any time after about eleven and you will know of his presence by the sound of his sandals or some other sign. Perhaps you may also see him when, in the early morning he leaves for Varanasi to bathe in the Ganges. He is so merciful that he will make you know of his presence some way or other." The priest then locked the temple door and invited Purohitswami to his home for a meal. Purohitswami declined the invitation so he brought him some milk. After some discussions on spiritual matters and exchange of divine experiences he left, leaving Purohitswami in the assembly hall alone to experience Shri Dattatreya's presence.

Purohitswami sat in the cold dark hall repeating God's name, his faculties alert for any sign of Shri Dattatreya's arrival. Around one AM he heard the sound of sandals treading the ground and the whole atmosphere was filled with a divine fragrance. He stood up to welcome his Master and made obeisance repeatedly with folded hands. He was drenched in sweat and eyes were full of tears of joy. He was standing like that for a few hours. The sound of the sandals again came, this time receding. It was a sign that Shri Dattatreya was leaving after the night's rest.

The priest was happy to hear of his experience which was repeated the following night also. On the third night, with the priest's permission, he decorated the bed with flowers. He had the same experience of previous nights. He could hear the sound of the cot when the occupant turns on sides. Again in the morning he heard the door being opened and sounds of receding sandals amidst entrancing fragrance. Next morning when the priest opened the temple door he was shocked to see the creased bed sheet and the shawl lying on one side as happens when one gets up from the bed. The signs of somebody having *physically* used the cot were evident and the priest was certain it was the result of Purohitswami's intense devotion and deep faith. This was the first time he was seeing such an event.

Purohitswami left after bidding farewell to the old priest accepting his blessings. When he emerged from the forest he saw a yogi who was naked and was looking as if he was staring into the infinite. Purohitswami approached him and made his obeisance. The saint muttered, "Behold the darling child of God who is struggling to get to Him." and hurried away. Purohitswami was sure these remarks referred to him, but the whole thing happened in a flash moment and appeared like an illusion.

The drinking yogi **F**rom Mahur Purohitswami came to the nearby town of Darva with the intention of meeting a sage. This sage, highly respected for his knowledge, could always be found in a tavern drinking liquor but was never affected by it. He used to say, "You people do not need advice or wisdom, you are born with it. But for these people who come here the best thing they have is liquor and they offer it to me and I give them in return the best thing I have that is the power of yoga." Purohitswami was staying with a pleader friend of his in Darva. The sage unexpectedly came there to meet Purohitswami and advised him to get married assuring him that his Guru would see it would not come in the way of his spiritual progress.

Marriage His father decided to settle permanently in Pune and came there with the entire family. Soon after coming to Pune he arranged for Purohitswami's marriage to Godavari, a good girl from middle class family. She mixed well with his family, understood her husband's love for the spiritual path and gave him her full support. Purohitswami would have liked to observe celibacy, but now that he was married the *Shastras* required that he father a male child in order that the family lineage continued. It would have been unethical to hurt the feelings of his family who dearly loved him and he compromised himself into following a family life leaving everything to the will of God. Their first child was a daughter. After her birth his wife also joined him in spiritual sadhana.

His Guru nominated While his wife had gone to her mother's place for the delivery of their daughter Purohitswami's *kundalini* was awakened as a result of his yogic practice. He passed now through a mixture of divine bliss and internal physical torture which many persons (but not all) suffer after the activation of Kundalini. This state lasted for three months. Purohitswami had considered Shri Dattatreya as his Guru from early days. One day he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya in which he was clearly told that "The person whom you have so far considered your friend is your Guru. There is no difference of any kind between him and me. I am worthy of his grace and he is worthy of mine. In future he shall be your Guru."

When he told this to Mr. Natekar he gave a sweet smile and embraced him. Purohitswami accepted his discipleship and sat at his feet. Mr. Natekar came from a rich family known for their good, ethical behaviour and religious nature. His father was a famous advocate who had handed over his share of property

to his brother after their father's death. Purohitswami's Guru was married and had two daughters and a son. He had completely devoted himself to the spiritual path. He had given away all his property in charity keeping just enough for family's survival. He was fully supported in his endeavour by his wife. He had considered Shri Dattatreya as his Guru and learnt yoga from various yogi saints. He had also made a pilgrimage all over India surviving on alms. Thus he had a lot of experience of the spiritual as well as the materialistic world. He had many disciples whose call he heard telepathically. Sometimes he would suddenly get up as if he has received a message and say he must go urgently and somehow he would reach that disciple who might be in need of his help or be in the final moments of his physical life.

His Guru came to stay with him in Pune and he had full opportunity to serve him. But his Guru always treated him like a friend. Whenever Purohitswami prepared bath water his Guru would go into a deep trance and come out of it after Purohitswami recited some Vedic hymns. He had achieved complete unity with God. Their stay together was very helpful to Purohitswami in overcoming many difficulties in his yogic practice. His Guru toured Maharashtra for six months taking Purohitswami with him. During the tour they had discussions on yoga and spiritual topics with many yogis and other people. Purohitswami realized that he himself had also developed certain powers for healing.

During the travels Purohitswami received instructions from Shri Dattatreya to start writing. He did not begin to write immediately and that day the vision was repeated. On the third night Shri Dattatreya again came in the vision and telling him that he was aware of his unwillingness to write but asked him to write for his sake. And when he sat for writing, he wrote three books in English, "In Quest of Myself", "Harbinger of Love" and "Song of Silence", taking eight days for each. Later he wrote two more books, "Honeycomb" and "At your Lotus feet". Later he also wrote poems, a drama, a novel, and a practical translation of Gita in Marathi. Besides he also wrote articles in Hindi and in Sanskrit on the topic of God.

After the birth of daughters in 1910 and 1914 and a son in 1915 the way for his adopting *sanyasa* was cleared according to the Shastras, (subject of course to the consent of his wife). His wife agreed to give her consent. After bidding farewell to his parents and family he left for Girnar where his Guru was waiting for him. But he did not become a *sanyasi* immediately.

Humility in service His Guru used to tell him that there was nothing new in the path of yoga. Every day the same steps are to be repeated. More we concentrate on the inside more one forgets the outside world. More you concentrate on God less your self-interest becomes and your attention is drawn towards perfection. Pursuing your goal with complete determination strictly and without bothering about anything else is the only proper way to attain it.

Purohitswami found pleasure in serving his Guru. There was no duality between him and Guru. Serving him was not a service at all. But real test lay in serving somebody who had no love or respect for you. Purohitswami therefore took up a 24-hour job with a person on a small salary. His wife and children also came to live with him. Their lodging and boarding was part of the wages. He worked for four years for an unappreciative person attending to his trade in the combined role of accountant, clerk, manager and labourer all in one. Only his Guru's strength carried him through. He experienced during this stint the truth of the dictum "Rich can do no wrong". At the end of the four years his family went to stay in his Guru's ashram and Purohitswami himself went to Mumbai. The rigours of the job had weakened his health. But a Gujarati friend took care of him and he recovered in about two months. He made one more visit to Girnar during the stormy monsoon weather of July dressed only in a gown and possessing only a brass pot for water.

Pilgrimage By 1923 he had passed through the three stages of life, Brahmachari (celibate), Grihasthi (householder) and Vanaprastha (living in forests), the latter being spent in the Guru's ashram for nine months working on farm jobs, as a mason and carpenter besides managing the routine worship in the

ashram. One day his Guru called him and instructed him to go first to Girnar and from there to visit all the important holy places in India, from the south to the north in the Himalayas. Many of these places were related to Shri Dattatreya. He was to observe certain rules very strictly. They were:

(1) To live by begging for alms only once in a day and only in one house.
(2) To accept invitation for meals without bothering about who has invited.
(3) Not to observe any caste restrictions.
(4) Never beg for money or clothes.
(5) Accept hospitality from any home only for one day unless requested by the host.
(6) Accept cooked food.

He then gave him a begging bowl and bade farewell. Purohitswami remembered his Guru telling his mother sixteen years earlier that the day she would see begging bowl in her son's hand would be the day of rejoicing.

Purohitswami went to Girnar and from there to the holy places all over India from Himalayas to Kanyakumari again in the Himalayas to Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, and Badrinarayan. He travelled by whatever transport offered to him and if none then on foot. He had no money and could ask none for it but somehow somebody always came along to help him either with a ticket or ride in a vehicle for the next stage of his journey. Many people whom he had never seen in his life before gave him shelter during his travels and felt happy in his company and talking to him. Sometimes his presence brought cure to the sick in the house and they were grateful.

Hand of Shri Dattatreya Purohitswami left everything to God's mercy and saw His hand working in times of need. Once while going to Himalayas from Hardwar, a person who had promised to give him some money next morning for his travels did not turn up. However as Purohitswami was leaving he came running and told him that he had forgotten his promise as he was engrossed in a worship but a sanyasi had come and reminded him. The person had rushed home to bring the five rupees for giving to Purohitswami. He had asked the sanyasi who he was and was told, "I am Dattatreya." Purohitswami thanked the person and explained to him who Dattatreya was. Purohitswami felt sorry that Shri Dattatreya had been put to so much trouble for his sake. During the dangerous travels through treacherous paths in the chilly Himalayas a dog suddenly joined him and accompanied him until his return to the plains and then disappeared as suddenly. He met a saint who invited him for meals. Purohitswami stayed with him for five days. At night while everybody was shivering he saw the saint sweating, such was his yogic attainment. Purohitswami had nothing new to tell him because the saint knew Purohitswami's mind inside out. On the other hand there was plenty to learn from him. Actually the saint told him before departing that he had a deep love for Purohitswami and had specially come there to meet him. After five days he asked Purohitswami to continue his pilgrimage and bade him farewell. There was even an incidence when he was saved from going on a wrong trail in the mountains by Maharshi Vyasa himself. But he came to know this two years later only from a saint when he returned to Pune. Such are the spiritual relations not comprehensible to worldly people.

Before going on the pilgrimage Purohitswami had kept away from public contact as much as possible to avoid disturbance in his *sadhana* (spiritual efforts). Many monks try to remain aloof from public for the very same reason and often do their *sadhana* in the solitude of deep forests. But it is one thing to avoid the world and another to face it and live in it without getting disturbed by vagaries of its behaviour. The former is comparatively easy but real test of equanimity which is the main sign of a yogi lies in the latter. The pilgrimages such as Purohitswami was doing were meant to prepare the seeker for developing equanimity. Purohitswami now had to eat whatever was offered to him and sometimes nothing at all. In India it is the part of religion and culture to feed a guest and especially *sadhus* who in turn bless you and share some of their spiritual knowledge with you if you are interested. But then all are not generous. He met an

old lady who gave him stale *puris* even though fresh ones were available, and in Kashmir where he was entertained by a Government official, the keeper of the guest house where he was sheltered used to divert the good food sent for him to his own starving family. In Mathura, the place made famous by Shri Krishna the ocean of compassion and notorious by the greedy priests, the priest of a temple to whom Purohitswami approached for alms, instead of giving alms, directed him to buy food from outside with own money. But these were exceptions which go to make the world what it is. He had to taste all sorts of food typical to the local customs: the sweets of Madhya Pradesh, extremely hot food of Andhra, food with lot of tamarind in Tamilnadu, the spiced tea of Gujarat, the salted tea of Kashmir and so on, and digest it. He had to accept and live on food which he had never liked earlier. This created a type of attitude of acceptance and removed all love of bodily pleasures. On his return Purohitswami was ill for several months with weak heart, liver, kidneys and what not. Allopathic treatment did not work and finally he was cured slowly and steadily by Ayurvedic treatment given by one of his friends.

One day his Guru called him and expressed satisfaction at his physical and spiritual progress and suggested he should go abroad. There were many persons there who were impressed by his poems. In India itself the principal of the Wilson College, Father Scott was very much impressed by his poems and had suggested that he should visit England. Now the same suggestion came from his Guru. After arranging for funds and getting introductions to various personalities abroad he left for England in 1930. While in Paris he again suffered from influenza and doctors had given up hopes. But that night he saw his Guru in person by his bedside in the hospital he was kept. He kept his hand on his chest, gazed into his eyes lovingly and vanished. Purohitswami recovered to the surprise of all.

Before departure for England his Guru had told him, "Remember that you are the Brahman." Purohitswami says, "People ask that if this world is filled with God then why good and evil were created and why the differences of big and small exist? The answer is that the norms of the practical world are not applicable to the divine. The differences come from intuitive understanding and are to be understood individually. Others cannot give you that understanding. When we personally enjoy the bliss of attaining the Divine with concentrated mind we also realize and obtain the highest kind of bliss." It is not clear when Purohitswami left his mortal body but it is believed he passed away in the late 1930s or early 1940s.

21. SHRI CHILE MAHARAJ

We now come to the biography of an unusual Datta devotee Shri Chile Maharaj who lived in Kolhapur and has a large number of devotees in Pune and Bombay. His name was Shankar and was the son of Mr. Dattatreya and Manjulabai Chile, a family of cowherds (Gavali) from Jeur, a village about twenty-five kilometres from Kolhapur. He was born on August 15, 1922. He lost his mother when he was a child and his father moved to Kolhapur where he studied up to matriculation. Unfortunately his father also died when he was studying in the matriculation class. Around the same time some strange changes occurred in his personality and he left his studies.

It is not clear what he did for the next five or six years and where he went for spiritual guidance. One version says that just before the matriculation examination his teacher remarked that he would not pass in mathematics; taking it to heart he remained for three days in a state of meditation in his closed room. After some days he went to the nearby Panchganga River and sat there in meditation for twenty-one days near one of the *samadhis* on the river bank. It is said that Shri Siddheshwar Maharaj brought him out of the *samadhi* state but since then he used to remain continuously in "Unmani" state, a high state of trance.

When he was about twenty-two he began to be known for his apparently incoherent behaviour like a mentally deranged person but people also found that whatever he said or predicted came out to be true. People started coming to him for solving their problems through spiritual means and the word spread that

he was a great saint. Many took spiritual advice from him and found peace. He was unpredictable in his behaviour and would wander or eat anywhere and anytime, behaviour associated with *Avaliyas* i.e. saints who have attained spiritual perfection who are not bound by any rules of behaviour.

In the compound of the famous Mahalakshmi temple of Kolhapur there is a Dattatreya temple near the north gate with an Oudumber tree nearby. Shri Chile Maharaj used to come there occasionally and rest under the tree. One day he picked up a bucket and started sprinkling water in front of Dattatreya temple. Mr. Vyas the temple priest objected to it and angrily drove him away. The same night Shri Dattatreya came in Mr. Vyasa's dream with a trident and *damaru* (a small drum) in hand and angrily asked him why he had stopped him when he was sprinkling water, warning him not to it again. Now he realized the worth of Chile Maharaj and was full of remorse. When after a few days Shri Chile Maharaj (he was about twenty-five years of age then) came to the temple Mr. Vyas, understanding now that he was a form of Shri Dattatreya, prostrated before him and worshipped him by regular ritual with sandal paste, flowers followed by *arati*. Recognizing the bond of devotion now developed, Shri Chile Maharaj used to visit Mr. Vyas at his home also. On the Gurupurnima day Mr. Vyas would perform his worship elaborately in great splendour while Chile Maharaj, who normally would have created some chaos, watched the whole process serenely respecting the devotion of Mr. Vyas. Besides Mr. Vyas, there were others like Mr. Sitaram Mane also from Kolhapur who had recognized the presence of Shri Dattatreya in Shri Chile Maharaj. He began to be known as Dattaswarupi Shri Chile Maharaj, Dattaswarupi meaning having the form of Shri Dattatreya.

Shri Chile Maharaj had devotees from all strata of society. He rarely remained in one place. If anyone wanted to know his whereabouts people went to a shoemaker who has a shop in Kolhapur (The shoemaker is no more. His son runs the shop). He always knew where Shri Chile Maharaj was at any time. Shri Chile Maharaj was beyond all rules and used to eat meat and drink hard liquor but was never affected by it. He often made others drink a glass of the drink but to them it tasted like coconut water or sherbet. He would shower choice abuses on a person and be very loving at the same time. People believed that when he abused somebody it removed a lot of *karmas* from that person's account. Often his behaviour and his instructions looked ridiculous for a common man but people knew that they should obey them if they were to benefit. He would give difficult tasks to people who came for spiritual guidance to test their steadiness. He always advised not to forget Shri Dattatreya while leading a family life. Mrs. Rajkunvar Bobde has given her experiences with Shri Chile Maharaj in an article. She used to have a deep desire for practicing yoga for spiritual purposes but was afraid to consult anybody because of the hypocrisy prevalent in the spiritual field. She practiced meditation only at home. She had met Shri Chile Maharaj first in 1963 and was impressed by him. She tells about how Chile Maharaj blessed her and predicted she will have good spiritual experiences. Two days later her Kundalini was awakened while she sat for meditation. She experienced bright light and musical sounds while in the state of meditation and saw Goddess Jagdamba in her beautiful splendour and later Shri Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi who had taken *samadhi* hundred years earlier.

Mr. Baburao Athane, a Jain by religion was his ardent devotee and has written his biography which is out of print today. He became a devotee after he had strange experience of the occult powers of Chile Maharaj. Mr. Athane had once gone to Narsobawadi on the instructions of Chile Maharaj. After worship the priest gave him five *pedhas* (milk sweet ball) as *prasad*. He returned to Kolhapur and was going to meet Chile Maharaj when somebody slapped on the back. It was Chile Maharaj himself who asked for his five *pedhas* before even Athane could say anything. Athane's mother was an orthodox Jain worshipping Shri Mahavir. She had no faith in Chile Maharaj. He also refused to go to Athane's house because she did not like this person who lived like an Avaliya who she thought desecrated her house. But one day she had the vision of Shri Mahavir in him and the situation changed. Many other persons became his devotees because of similar visions through which their Gurus told them they were not different from him. Many had similar experiences. One thing must be mentioned and that is, Chile Maharaj used his powers to benefit

his devotees and he used them even to free people from possession by spirits and effects of black magic besides curing people of their illnesses. Though he guided many he never initiated anybody as his disciple.

Chile Maharaj used to consider Shri Shankar Maharaj of Pune as his spiritual elder brother. Devotees of Shri Shankar Maharaj were always welcome in his presence. For a fortnight before he left his body he was not well and had become very weak. His devotees brought him from Kolhapur to Pune and admitted him in a hospital. He passed away on May 7, 1986. His body was first taken to the house of Mr. Datta Abhyankar, a great disciple of Shri Shankar Maharaj where thousands of people paid their respects. From there the body was taken to Paijarwadi near his birth place Jeur where he had already selected a place for his samadhi. His body now reposes there. Thousands of devotees visit there every year. Currently his sister Akka looks after the daily arrangements.

22. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The biographies presented above take one to the world of seekers and saints who have only one aim and that is the self-realization. Worldly desires and ambitions are all secondary and are abandoned by the seekers who do not mind even physical pain for achieving their goal. Some may hanker for a vision of Dattatreya and some may even be successful in achieving it but the main aim even there is Shri Dattatreya's grace for achieving that goal.

We have already seen from Part I that Dattatreya we worship today is not Dattatreya the historical person born in Atri lineage and who was a householder to start with. Neither is he the Dattatreya associated with Tantric cult. He is the one created by Puranas

Some of us worship him in a normal human form dressed as an ascetic and some others as the form with three-heads-six arms or some other combinations.

But we must take cognizance of Sir Vajrendranath Sheel's statement (See Part I-A) and on the same lines of argument say "**Whether Shri Dattatreya we worship is the Historical one or the Puranic one or whether we worship Dattatreya as a principle does not matter. The three can exist independently and the vision devotees get is of the Dattatreya we worship in the form we imagine him to be, either one headed or three headed or me we may merely experience him as a Principle or a manifestation of the Ultimate Brahman.**

The above biographies of the saints show that the saints were born with the spiritual qualities. These qualities were manifested in most cases since their childhood itself. This is true of all saints, whichever traditions they belong to. This also indicates that these saints were reincarnations of persons who had significant developed spiritually and died before they could achieve Self-realization. In this regard what Dnyaneshwar Maharaj has said in Dnyaneshwari in Ch 6:437-467 9 becomes exactly relevant. (See quote in part IVI). Some saints reincarnate intentionally as in the case of Saint Balavadhut, the Guru of Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar who reincarnated as Balmukund Saraswati,

We see a Divine hand in the way in which any particular saint was steered in his lifetime towards his goal. Many aspirants read such biographies and become sad or lose hope because he does not get his divine experience. But he need not because one does not know who he (or she) was in his earlier lifetimes leave alone his own spiritual achievements. Success depends upon so many factors: strength and sincerity of desire, one's character, behaviour and attitudes, regularity of his *Sadhana* (spiritual efforts), and most of all Divine grace (Dnyaneshwari 18:348-352), may extend over more than one lifetime and every step we take takes one nearer to his goal in whichever lifetime the Divine will lead to it.

Many of the saints achieve *siddhis* (Occult powers) by virtue of their *sadhana.* Though it has been recommended that these powers should not be used lest it causes their spiritual downfall, the compassion of

these saints is such that some of them take the risk to help mankind. And it appears they do get a Divine support in this.

The Orthodox and Non-orthodox We note among the devotees and avatars of Dattatreya two distinct attitudes towards the Chaturvarnya or the Four-caste system in the Hindu religion and towards the hitherto prescribed ways of behaviour for the four castes. .

There are the extreme orthodox saints like Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Vamanbuva (Brahmachari) Vamorikar who believed that Dattatreya's avatars were intended to maintain the four-caste system which they considered as the foundation of the Vedic religion. Though their grace extended to all, they considered Vedas, and many religious practices are taboo to women and non-Brahmins. They considered reciting Vedas in their presence and people of other religions a great sin resulting in even rebirth as a *Chandala*, i.e. lowest of the low castes and an untouchable.

As opposed to this are saints like Shri Swami Samarth, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, Shri Shankar Maharaj, Shri Chile Maharaj, Purohitswami, the Nath Sect yogis, saints belonging to the Mahanubhava sect etc., who never gave any importance to caste or gender or even religion. That is why there are many Muslims who are devotees of Dattatreya and many belong to the Nath sect.

We shall see in the forthcoming discussions that in the early Vedic times there was a *Varna* system which was not birth based but evolved into a birth based caste system later. Though the four-caste system has been rigorously practiced over centuries, the advent of foreign rule has made the system very much redundant. There are many orthodox Brahmins who still practice the daily religious rites as prescribed by *smritis* which is very creditable because it gives them a great inner strength and even Divine grace. However, for the most part the caste system seems to be invoked today only as far as marriages are concerned in most parts of India. Thus foreign rule, both by the Muslim invaders and by the British-Portuguese-French conquerors has had great influence in progressively changing the socio-religious structure of the Hindu society in India. Large scale emigration abroad has further changed the manner of religious practices in the alien lands on account of the very different geographical and climatic conditions there than the native Indian.

Adjusting to Socio-political conditions We note from the biographies of the avatars and devotees of Dattatreya that these saints worked according to the socio-political situation existing during their era and tried to save the Hindu way of life from corruption at the same time extending their compassion and grace to others whether a Hindu or not.

Before the Muslim invasions of India, the Hindu daily life was led according to the caste system. Study of religious texts and philosophy like *darshanas*, Bhagavad-Gita etc. was restricted to Brahmins; Kshatriyas were assigned fighting and protection of people; Vaishyas were traders, farmers and practiced other crafts also; Shudras were supposed to serve the higher castes.

There was no caste system but only *varnas* in the Vedic times when Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were professions and not castes; a Kshatriya's son could choose to be a Brahmin as can be seen from the example of king Shantanu's brother Devapi who chose to be a *rishi* and became the disciple of Rishi Arstisena. Devapi's hymn occurs in the tenth *mandala* of the Rigveda. Brahmins also chose to follow Kshatriya profession: Parashurama became a warrior and King Bharata's son Vitatha was born a Brahmin of rishi Bharadwaja descent. To a lesser scale even Vaishyas could be rishis as may be seen from the example of Manu Savarni who became a priest to kings Nahusha and Yayati.

After the profession based caste system turned into birth based caste system a conflict between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas started as to who was superior. A good amount of text in Shantivarva of Mahabharata is devoted to this issue. Parashurama's battles with Kshatriyas is part of this conflict. In time how-

ever, with Kshatriyas became busy in ruling the kingdom and in wars, Brahmins tightened their hold on them banning even Brahmin women from listening to Veda recitations, making education and learning a Brahmin sanctuary, in stark contrast of the past when women like Maitreyi and Lopamudra could be rishis.

With the advent of Buddhism the system broke to some extent because Buddhism (and also Jainism) did not recognize caste system and admitted all in their fold. After Adi Shankaracharya (ca. 8th century AD) resurrected the Hindu religion the caste system again raised its head even though it borrowed many things from the new Buddhism. Puranas created the new Dattatreya around this time and it is no wonder that they stressed that his birth was meant to save the Chaturvarnya system i.e. the Four-caste system. The Chaturvarnya system seems to have been an accepted way of life until Muslims began to rule India.

Early Muslim invaders invaded to loot and take it away to back home. They also killed men from the conquerred areas and took away the rest to be sold as slaves. What happened to the caste system among these enslaved victims when survival overrode everything else can well be imagined.

Later Muslim invaders came to stay and rule the conquerred regions. For the sake of administering the conquerred lands these rulers had to be tolerant to the conquerred people because they needed the services of educated people good in administration which the Hindu educational system provided. Brahmins who were educated were the first choice and out of avarice many of them converted to Islam. Those who did not convert had to change their lifestyles to suit the new masters because all said and done royal displeasure meant imprisonment, death or a forced conversion. Unfortunately the bane of the Hindu psyche has been that while they could be courteous or indifferent to non-Hindus, Hindu society is not sympathetic with their own brother Hindus who socialised with Muslims. They are quickly outcaste forcing them to be converted.

Next were the warriors and other castes that went the same way. But this tolerance did not bridge the divide between the followers of the two religions. Step motherly treatment with restrictions on the Hindus became a normal way of life.

Brahmins being the highest educated class well versed in the Dharma, rituals and ethics have always been the guiding flames in those matters. Suppression by Muslim rulers and natural human avarice undermined their capacity to guide. The type of egotistic Brahmins mentioned in Ch 25 of the Gurucharitra, who bragged about their knowledge of the Vedas, reciting them before the Muslim king and travelling in the kingdom with his permission seeking debates with other Brahmins naturally lost the moral right to guide the Hindus in the matter of the practice of Dharma. Thus it was natural and proper for Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 A.D.) to uphold the Chaturvarnya System.

Within two centuries after Narasimha Saraswati, it was common for Brahmins to work for the Muslim rulers. Janardanswami and Eknath had reached a high level in the administration and the Muslim king was so influenced by the spiritual power of Janardanswami that even the weekly holiday was shifted from Friday to Thursday in Daulatabad. By this time some Muslim Sufis had begun to worship Dattatreya who appeared before Janardanswami and Eknath dressed as Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir.

The birth and the field of action of the Fourth Dattatreya avatar Manik Prabhu was in the Muslim ruled Nizam kingdom. By this time merger of Hindu and Muslim population had reached some sort of equilibrium point. Manik Prabhu was supported by the Nizam administration and also had many Muslim followers though they seem to have been attracted more by his occult powers than the relig`ious doctrine of the Sakalmat Sampradaya. By this time the British had started ruling a major part of India. We see repercussions of this in the attitude of Shri Swami Samarth the third avatar.

We see Swami Samarth totally ignoring rules of caste, gender and religion. He had Muslim disciples and among Hindus, he had disciples among Brahmins as well as Shudras. He tried to rid his disciples of the caste and religion bias as can be seen from his instructions to Balappa to drink water from an "impure house" and Madhavji Govindji to give the food first to a fakir and then eat the remnants. But not everybody accepted it. We have already seen how Vamanbuva Vamorikar has supported the Caste system in Guruleelamrita.

Thus we see that the avatars of Dattatreya in the last seven centuries have been in consonance with the socio-political conditions and have tried to elevate the spirituality level within the society against the prevailing odds since the first avatar 1320AD.

When one reviews the biographies of Datta-devotees, we notice that a large number were Brahmins by birth. This should be expected because Brahmins had a more intimate religious background compared with others and also had the basic training in austere behaviour by choice or by birth rather than by poverty. But many Datta-devotees were not Brahmins e.g. Kinaram Aghori (a Kshatriya) and Chile Maharaj (a cowherd). Among the disciples of Shri Swami Samarth were Swamisut (a maratha), Ananda Bharati (a fisherman) and the Muslim Jamadar of Mandargi. Chand Bodhale, the guru of Janardanswami was a Muslim. When we come to Nath sect yogis who are also devotees of Dattatreya we note that these yogis came from even lowest strata of society e.g. Jandharnath was a *shudra* or probably even lower.

The Four paths Dattatreya tradition has devotees who follow all the four paths viz. Jnana (Knowledge), Action (karma), Yoga and Bhakti (devotion.) We may note that it is natural, for historical reasons that the path of *jnana* in India would be followed almost exclusively by Brahmins though that need not be the situation today. In olden days, *karma* implied performance of *yajnas* etc. and would have been confined only to Brahmins and Kshatriyas. However Bhagavad-Gita interprets Karma more broadly as any action or duty in normal life and further enjoins the doer to do actions with the attitude of a non-doer. Yoga also in ancient days, because it requires a Guru was confined mostly to Brahmins and Kshatriyas, but with the introduction of Rajyoga and especially the Siddhayoga or Shaktipat system of awakening kundalini (See Biography of Gulwani Maharaj in Part VII-3) persons including women from all strata of society have been initiated in the system. The fourth path of Bhakti or devotion does not require a Guru. It requires only a spark of devotion to be created in the mind. How can caste system prevent anyone from being a devotee?

When we come to the devotees of Rama and Krishna (especially as Vithoba of Pandharpur) we see devotes from a wide range of caste levels: the untouchable Chokha Mela, Narahari the goldsmith, Sena the barber, Saint Tukaram a Vaishya (who had a Brahmin disciple), Gora the potter, Namdeo the tailor and Eknath a Brahmin, just to name a few. The Varkari sect who are devotees of Vithoba of Pandharpur observe the caste rules only for Matrimonial purposes. Kabir was a Muslim and his guru was Swami Ramanand Tirth, a Brahmin.

Thus the path of Bhakti or devotion has devotees from all strata of society and the deity worshipped may be any of the many deities e.g. Shiva, Vishnu, Devi or Dattatreya.

Passage to Hypocrisy In the new way of life during and after the British rule livelihood became increasingly dependent upon attending offices and factories. Punctuality became a virtue and timetable of work came to be determined by the Gregorian calendar instead of the *muhurtas* (auspicious times) from the lunar *panchangas.*

In the beginning, it was the higher caste persons that joined such type of work in the government offices. People from other castes also joined with the opening of the education the other castes. With a stable government with built-in protection from law and order, business and trade increased and naturally offices to manage them also increased. Cities developed and progressed. Banks progressively replaced the

traditional moneylenders. In general need for management of both government and private enterprises created a boom in the number of office and factory workers from peons, clerks, operators to managers who had to be punctual. Thus it became impractical to live with the daily routines prescribed in Ch 36 and 37 of Gurucharitra or in *smritis* in general for a traditional Hindu way of life except in the rural areas. Ghaisas (See Bibliography) in the commentary on the above chapters in the book giving the prose translation of Gurucharitra acknowledges this situation and conceding the impracticability of practicing the prescribed routines recommends that they should be modified to suit the conditions. However this has not resulted in the rethinking about the practicability of a caste system in modern India. And in Hindu religious system there is no final authority on religion.

Problems of Urban life Today we see a very hypocritical Hindu society in which we talk about casts without really bothering about behaviour according to caste rules. In today's world it is difficult to observe them. Nobody bothers or has ever bothered that the very texts taboo to Hindu non-Brahmins were made freely available to Western Scholars under the protection from British rule. They not only translated the Vedas and other ancient religious works into English and other languages making them available to one and all but also analysed them among thoroughly for their authenticity also among other aspects.

We have given up the caste system for all practical purposes. Even those Brahmins who read Gurucharitra piously and study the 36th and 37th chapters on the prescribed behaviour of a Brahmin cannot live according to those prescribed standards. Those who live in cities and have to maintain work timings cannot observe the rules of *sandhya* strictly. He has to take at least one meal plus the mid-time snacks outside his home and not only eat food cooked and served by persons of who knows which caste or religion! One cannot perform a *homa* in a small flat or feed the cow or even crows during a *shraddha* ceremony in a city in India, leave alone in a foreign country. In fact, even in the matter of reading of Gurucharitra for which certain norms have been prescribed, there are Datta-devotees who have to mange the reading during the free time available during flights or a bus or car ride. I personally am sure Lord Dattatreya would not mind these devotees bypassing the norms, such is his compassion.

Problems of living abroad People who have to travel abroad in the west for a living have still worse problems regarding traditional religious practices. In the northern latitudes in the west length of the day can be only about eight hours in winter to sixteen hours in summer; in the arctic zone countries sun does not rise at all for a few days and does not set at all for another few days six months later. In winter the sun rises almost in the south rather than the east as in the middle and southern India. *Smriti* rules for daily activities related to sunrise and sunset and to the directions were meant for the Indian situation and do not hold good in these regions. Other problems like taking bath, washing feet and suitable food also exist. Now that a large number of emigrants from India have settled in UK, USA and Europe can our Pundits modify the rules suitably?

It appears that the rules of the caste system today are used only in matrimonial relationships.

In summary, it is evident that Dattatreya Tradition has always adopted itself to the prevailing socio-political situations. As regards the orthodox views about Dattatreya birth being in support of caste system it is evident that these were merely personal views of these saints who lived true to their beliefs. The personal views of the aspirants or devotees or saints do not matter to the Divine. They are really earthly matters otherwise how could the world which is 90% non-Hindu and therefore beyond the purview of caste system would have survived?

Guru worship is the heart of Dattatreya Tradition. Dattatreya is more often referred to as Datta-guru than any other name. In this tradition we see a fusion of all the four paths viz. Knowledge, Action (Karma), Yoga and Devotion (Bhakti. Every *sadhak* in this tradition practices a combination of the four paths with Bhakti as a common denominator. Introduction of Shaktipat yoga by Gulwani Maharaj and Swami Lok-

nath Tirth has made the yoga path relatively simple. It has been said that one may experience Brahman through Kundalini path but that experience is without bliss. Bliss can be experienced only if the practice is supported by devotion because devotion is love that induces happiness.

Not all devotees are *sadhaks* or aspirants. They are actually in minority. Most people pray to God with materialistic aims. Life in this world is full of failures, disappointments, pain and sorrow. People need relief. Just as we go to a doctor for our illnesses similarly we turn to God in case of distress if it cannot be mitigated easily. And the best way to approach God is to approach a saint who is closer to God and intercede on your behalf. Even here, it is to approach a saint who is no more in his (or her) physical body rather than a living one because in view of the large number of frauds going around, it is safer to go to a proved saint. When people cannot reach a saint then they perform *vratas like* fasting, reciting mantras and japa, worship rituals, reading and recitation of *Stotras and so on.* For Datta devotees reading of Gurucharitra has proved to be very effective probably because it brings you nearer to Dattatreya who listens to your problems.

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PART III

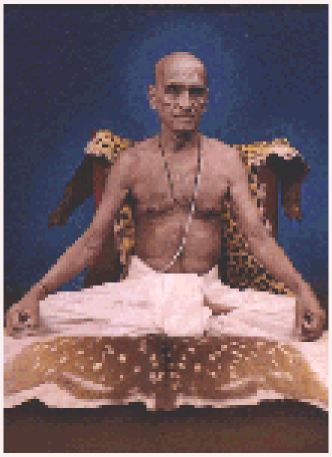
FOLLOWERS OF THE SHAKTIPAT SYSTEM

1. GULWANI MAHARAJ

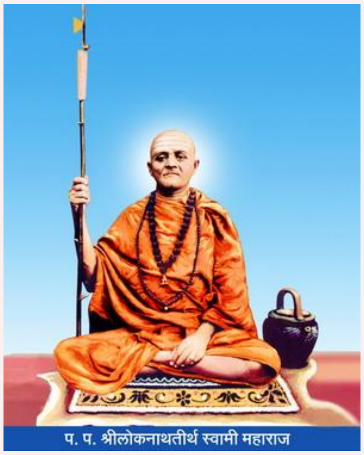
Gulwani Maharaj is known for the *Shaktipat* system of initiation. First let us review briefly some information about the various systems of initiation in order to understand the importance and implication of the *Shaktipat* system. There are many ways by which a Guru may initiate his disciple: through *Mantradiksha* (prescribing a mantra secretly in the disciple's ear), by *Sparshadiksha* (by touch), by *Swapnadiksha* in which Guru appears in the disciple's dream and initiates him.

With *Mantradiksha* the disciple is expected to repeat the mantra for a given minimum number of times at prescribed times of the day. With *Sparshadiksha*, practiced in the Siddhayoga system, the Guru transfers his energy into the disciple by touching him and awakens his *Kundalini*. This is called *Shaktipat*. (In Maharashtra this is practiced at the Ganeshpuri Ashram of Swami Nityananda in Vajreshwari about 150 Km from Mumbai). But the peculiarity of the *Shaktipat* technique used by Gulwani Maharaj is that it can be done without touch, from a distance of even several thousand kilometres and even through a letter.

About Kundalini Awakening of the *Kundalini* force which lies dormant in every individual is considered as an important milestone in the spiritual progress of a seeker. *Kundalini* may be awakened through certain practices of Hathayoga or by receiving energy from one's Guru as mentioned above. This latter practice is naturally associated with worship of one's Guru and is an advantage of the system of Guru-worship. There are instances where *Kundalini* has been awakened accidentally but that is rare and sometimes dangerous.



Shri Gulwani Maharaj



Swami Loknath Tirth Maharaj

Chakras Once *Kundalini* is awakened, certain nerves in the spine get activated. (Sixth chapter of Dnyaneshwari gives a detailed account of what happens when Kundalini is awakened. See V.V. Shirvaikar in Bibliography). A life force progressively rises upwards from the base of the spine towards the top of the

head activating certain centres which are traditionally called Chakras. *Muladhar Chakra* is the lowermost *Chakra* residing at a location near the base of one's spine near about the sexual organs and at which the dormant *Kundalini* is located in all persons. This is what is activated first. There are six more *Chakras* above the *Muladhar*. These are: the *Swadhishtan Chakra* located a little above the *Muladhar Chakra* and below the navel, the *Manipur Chakra* near the navel, *Anahat Chakra* near the heart, the *Vishuddha Chakra* at the throat, the *Adnya Chakra* in between the eyebrows and the seventh and last is the *Sahasrara Chakra or Chakra of thousand lotuses* on the vertex crown of the head. When the *Kundalini* is awakened and the Muladhar Chakra is activated the seeker experiences strange vibrations and a feeling of happiness which lasts long after he has come out of the meditative state. As the seeker continues to practice meditation the *Kundalini* force progressively rises upwards activating the successive *Chakras*. Each *Chakra* gives unique experiences to the seeker but the actual experiences may vary with the individual. The *Kundalini* force enters all parts of the body and purifies it of the impurities accumulated since childhood. Activation of the *Chakras* accelerates the spiritual progress. Consciousness expands. In time, when the *Kundalini* force reaches the *Sahasrara*, the seeker gets the experience of the Divine and is liberated from the influence of mundane subjects. Depending upon the efforts of the seeker and Guru's benevolence the time taken from the awakening and the ultimate realization may vary between immediate to several years and *sometimes lifetimes* too.

Hathayoga system Some people try the Hathayoga technique to activate their *Kundalini*. But Hathayoga practice is primarily a physical exercise which disciplines and tones the body. It requires the discipline of mind too. It is possible to activate *Kundalini* by this technique, but is considered dangerous unless conducted under an able guide. It is important that the activated force must calm down after some time so that the seeker can go about his worldly duties. It is said that with Hathayoga technique it is difficult to calm down the force without Guru’s help and if the force does not calm down it can be dangerous for the person mentally and physically. Old Nath Panthi yogis used this technique. But its main use of Hathayoga today seems to be to discipline the body so that one is able to sit in a steady posture for a long time.

Rajayoga system In the Raja Yoga system of Pantanjali things are simpler. In this system it is not considered as a physical exercise but an exercise to control the mind. The seeker sits in a “*sukhasana*” or posture of comfort, (usually *sahajasana* posture sitting with crossed legs) on a comfortable seat in order that the bodily discomforts do not distract the mind. He then has to silence his mind through meditation, closing his eyes and concentrating in between the eyebrows. Thoughts are *not to be suppressed but allowed*; they slowly go away and the mind is silenced. If they do not go then it is recommended to observe them like an outsider, which makes them go away. In another technique it is recommended to concentrate on breathing which again makes the thoughts stop. Imagining vast expanse of a calm ocean or infinite space also helps. There are many such ways but the goal is to silence the mind by stopping the internal dialogue one generally has with oneself. Constant meditation together with Guru’s blessings activates the *Kundalini* someday. Required control of breath occurs automatically as silence is achieved. *Kundalini* thus activated calms down automatically after a certain time and is reactivated whenever one sits for meditation. It may take years of meditation before *Kundalini* is activated and many more years and even lifetimes before the force reaches the *Sahasrara*. It is of course necessary for the seeker whose *Kundalini* is activated to have simple diet and not to do work involving heavy physical strains or situations of excitement. In general good habits and control of mind must be cultivated.

Shaktipat system In the *Shaktipat* system (also called Siddhayoga system), once the energy is transferred by the Guru the disciple feels internal changes, his thigh muscles tighten and the sitting posture becomes firm, his spine becomes erect and breath is controlled. All this occurs automatically and involuntarily. The *Kundalini* is awakened and the disciple sits in that position for some time until he is able to open his eyes to experience joy in his surroundings. The disciple may experience many more things e.g. sounds, light, vision, *pranayama* actions, certain Hathayoga actions related to Kundalini or he may even laugh or cry. Later, he is *automatically timed* to sit for meditation, generally in the predawn hours. Dur-

ing this sitting the yogic processes and the necessary *pranayama* or breathing processes continue automatically during his lifetime. The *Kundalini* force slowly rises to reach the successive *Chakras*. His spiritual progress continues even while he follows a family life. Another advantage with this system is that the intense physical pains and mental disturbances which often accompany the Kundalini awakening and may last for several months are absent in the *Shaktipat* system.

Gulwani Maharaj and Shaktipat Swami Lokanath Tirtha used this process to initiate Gulwani Maharaj into this system and later empowered him to continue the system by which hundreds of people have benefited so far. A brief history of the events that brought this important system basically associated with Goddess Kali to the Datta-Parampara in Maharashtra is given later after the brief biography of Gulwani Maharaj which follows.

Vamanrao was the son of a pious couple Dattatreya Gulwani and Umabai from Kaulavagaon near Kolhapur. He was born at Kudutri on December 23, 1886. After his thread ceremony at the age of seven Vaman went through the traditional education of religious texts and religious rituals. Vaman had a natural talent for drawing and after passing his grade exams in drawing in 1907 he joined the well-known J. J. School of Art in Mumbai.

In the same year, while Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) was camping at Narsobawadi, Vaman who was at that time in Kolhapur received a message from his brother that he should immediately come to Narasobawadi with a picture of Shri Dattatreya and a garland of flowers. These items were offered to Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati who liked the photo and rewarded Vaman with a talisman which Vaman subsequently always tied round his arm.

Sometime later, Vaman suffered an attack of plague and was unconscious for ten days. However he recovered and was grateful to Shri Dattatreya for the grace thus shown. As a mark of gratitude he did seven readings of Gurucharitra at Narsobawadi living only on alms. He now became an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya. Around this time Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati had camped at a place called Pavani in Vidarbha for *Chaturmas*, the four monsoon months during which the *sanyasis* do not travel. Vaman's brother called him there with his mother. In this visit Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati initiated Vaman as his disciple.

Vamanrao unsuccessfully tried for a job in Mumbai and in disgust left home for Ganagapur with just two dresses and a pot, to serve at the feet of Shri Dattatreya. Here also he performed seven readings of Gurucharitra. He was anxious to meet his Guru and having heard that he was in Havanur region in Karnataka, he rushed there on feet, for he had no money. On the way he learnt that his Guru was at Dharwad and to reach quickly there he sold his blanket to raise money for the railway fare. Unfortunately he reached Dharwad only to learn that his Guru had already left. After trailing him for many days he finally caught up with him at Havanur. Once with his Guru he insisted upon staying with him. The discourses given by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati were spiritually very beneficial to him. After a few days Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati gave him instructions personally on Gita and Vishnu Sahasranama (Thousand names of Vishnu). He also taught him some yoga postures. Vamanrao continued to accompany his Guru except for short spells which he spent at religious places like Ganagapur. Vamanrao was a good painter. He painted two pictures, one of Tungabhadra and another of one-headed Dattatreya which he offered to his Guru.

From 1917 onwards, three years after his Guru's samadhi, Vamanrao took up a job of a drawing teacher, first at a municipal school in Barshi up to 1926 and then in NMV high school in Pune until 1942. He travelled on pilgrimage all over India. He also continued practice of yoga and wanted to work towards awakening of *Kundalini* through the Hathayoga practice. While engaged in these efforts he learnt that his brother disciple Govindaswami, an expert in Hathayoga, was at Hoshangabad. It was arranged through correspondence that Vamanrao would go to Hoshangabad to get guidance from Govindaswami in the

matter of awakening *Kundalini*. This visit to Hoshangabad opened a new chapter in the life of Vamanrao through certain events which had its origins in Bengal. He came in contact with Swami Chinmayananda who, after he took Dandi Sanyas was known later as Swami Lokanath Tirtha. We shall refer to him as Swamiji.

Swamiji was visiting Hoshangabad on divine instructions. Swamiji used the technique of *Shaktipat* to awaken the *Kundalini* of the disciple he wished to initiate. In this system the would-be disciple simply sits with eyes closed in front of or near the Guru and the Guru transfers his own energy into the disciple to awaken his *Kundalini*. No physical touch is necessary. Instantly the disciple's body starts performing *pranayama* and other yogic processes like *Bhasrika* automatically without his control. The process of *Shaktipat* lasts for about an hour during which the disciple is filled with vigour and bliss. After that the process automatically starts whenever the disciple sits in the meditation posture. This of course is only the beginning and it may take several years before he reaches the stage of self-realization.

Hathayoga practice did not help Vamanrao in awakening his *Kundalini*. On the other hand he noticed that many of his acquaintances had their *Kundalini* awakened by Swamiji by the *Shaktipat* process. Situation arose when Vamanrao invited Swamiji to live in his house. (See later in the next section). One day Vamanrao requested Swamiji for the favour of *Shaktipat* and one evening in 1922 Swamiji made him sit in front of him with closed eyes and awakened his *Kundalini*. A week later Vamanrao left for Barshi. In 1926 he came to Pune in NMV high School as a drawing teacher and took a house in Narayanpeth. His *sadhana* continued. Vamanrao's character, his regularity in his spiritual practice etc. had impressed Swamiji very much. Swamiji, by a letter, gave him authorization to initiate others by the *Shaktipat* system. Swamiji liked this disciple very much and used to visit him often and stay with him for months.

In 1961 when Panshet dam broke the resultant floods in Pune washed away the Narayanpeth residence. Gulawani Maharaj had to leave the place literally with the clothes he was wearing. His disciples included doctors, architects and engineers. They decided to build a building for him which would be his Ashram and where his Padukas could be installed. They built this large building just off Karve road and named it Vasudevashram after his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. It was inaugurated on 27th January 1965. It became a centre for his spiritual activities. Gulawani Maharaj took samadhi on 15th January 1974. With hundreds of disciples living in Pune Vasudevashram continues to be very active in spiritual activities today. Gulawani Maharaj authorized his disciple Kavishwar Maharaj to continue the work. After the death of Kavishwar Maharaj the centre is headed by Shri Narayankaka Dhekne.

2. THE STORY OF *SHAKTIPAT* YOGA

When one reads about *Shaktipat* Yoga one cannot help appreciating how the Divine hand has given to a worthy seeker an easy tool for attaining Self-realization. How the *Shaktipat* system reached Maharashtra from the Himalayas via Bengal is briefly described in the following. Reader should note that this system came from the devotees of Goddess Kali and not of Shri Dattatreya. But now, through Swami Lokanath Tirtha and Shri Gulawani Maharaj this system has entered the mainstream of Datta-tradition. In contrast with other systems like Hathayoga which the Nath Sect yogis used to activate the Kundalini, the *Shaktipat* system does not require Guru's physical touch and there are cases where the *Kundalini* has been awakened through a letter.

Shri Gangadhartirtha Maharaj The technique of *Shaktipat* was started by Shri Gangadhartirtha Maharaj. His original name is not known but he lived approximately between 1840 and 1908 AD. He was simplicity himself never making any show of his powers. Nothing is known about him or his family except that he was a Bajapeyi Brahmin from Ayodhya. He had a detached nature and he left his home to travel in Himalayas in spiritual pursuit. While in Himalayas he encountered a sanyasi who initiated him through the *Shaktipat* technique. After giving him adequate guidance the two parted never to meet again on material

plane. His goal achieved, Gangadhartirtha Maharaj returned to the plains and came to Jagannathpuri in Orissa. He stayed for some time in Govardhanpitha and adopted *sanyasa*. He then returned to Jagannathpuri and being averse to company he built a small hut on the border of the Chandan lake far away from the city. He had a couple of disciples who used to beg alms for him for he never liked to go in a crowd. Because of this nobody knew about his powers and he was left alone. The technique of *Shaktipat* would have gone and forgotten with him but fortunately he gained a worthy disciple who was taught the technique. The name of this disciple was Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj.

Narayantirtha Maharaj His original name was Kalikishore Gangopadhyaya, belonging to a Brahmin family from Eastern Bengal, now in Bangla Desh. His father Tarinicharan and mother Navadurgadevi were very pious persons. The family was very poor but generous to mendicants (*Sadhus*) coming for alms. Kalikishore was born to them on the Kojagiri Pournima day (five days after Dassera) in 1870. Because of poverty he could study only up to sixth standard. Like his parents Kalikishore was also pious and besides had a detached nature. After his thread ceremony at the age of seven he gained the right to Gayatri Mantra. He did *Japa* of Gayatri Mantra with great dedication. This increased his inner strength which was reflected in his bright aura. When he was about twelve his parents decided to get him married but when Kalikishore learnt about it he ran away from home in search of a Guru. He did not succeed however and had to return home three years later. At the age of eighteen he was married to Sarojinidevi against his wish. He tried many jobs but did not last long anywhere. He finally came to Calcutta where he found a job in a printing press. His visits to spiritual places and people and search for a Guru continued. One day he again left the job and went in search of a Guru. He met many including many frauds and finally reached Jagannathpuri.

In Jagannathpuri he met an acolyte named Karali Brahmachari who led him to Gangadhartirtha Maharaj. The quiet atmosphere and the serene tranquil personality of Gangadhartirtha Maharaj impressed Kalikishore. He realised he had found his Guru. He made his obeisance and sat in peace. Sometime later Gangadhartirtha Maharaj asked him briefly whether he intended to stay. Kalikishore answered in the affirmative. After keenly observing Kalkishore for about a month Gangadhartirtha Maharaj agreed to his request for initiation. On the Akshaya Tritiya day (This falls in April/May) in 1889 he initiated Kalikishore (now in his nineteenth year) as his disciple. First he asked Kalkishore to bring some flowers as Gurudakshina and to shave his head and take bath. After accepting the flowers as Gurudakshina he made Kalikishore sit on the seat before him with eyes closed. Kalikishore first prostrated before his Guru and filled with emotions grasped his feet. After calming Kalikishore Gangadhartirtha Maharaj told him, “I am going to initiate you with *mantra* and yogic power. You are only to witness. When the feelings which are awakened now mature fully, understand that you have reached the limit of Knowledge. That is the sign of Knowledge.” Gangadhartirtha Maharaj then transmitted his energy to Kalikishore in whose mind the *japa* of the Guru’s mantra began to repeat automatically and he began experiencing waves of bliss. Gangadhartirtha Maharaj asked him to open the eyes and asked him to continue the *japa* with understanding its meaning and promised all his wishes would be fulfilled.

After a few days Kalikishore requested his Guru to initiate him as a sanyasi. When asked about his family Kalikishore replied that he had no family. Gangadhartirtha Maharaj kept quiet but next day he called Kalikishore and reprimanded him for speaking untruth and told him the details about his family. Telling that he had initiated him because of his earnest request he advised him to go home and gain knowledge through yoga and *sadhana* while performing the family duties to his parents, to his brother, sister and wife. He gave him a sound advice which being very useful is summarized here.

He said, “You must enjoy or suffer your Karmas of which you are not aware of but which I am able to see. As long as the Karmas and desires remain there cannot be any *sanyasa*. The ochre dress of a sanyasi, his string of *rudraksha* beads are all external decorations which if they generate an ego will only cause your downfall. A person remains worldly as long as he carries desires in his mind. The right stage for taking *sanyasa* is after one attains perfection through Knowledge by *sadhana* with the blessings of his Guru and

with the grace of God. Though you are faithful and dedicated it would be a mistake to let you continue with me considering what is written in your destiny and the desire you carry. It is the responsibility of a Guru to act in the best interests of his disciple and because of things which you cannot see but I can, I have to harden my heart and ask you to go back to your family. The care you feel for your family which is hidden in your mind will bring impediments in your *sadhana* if you do not complete your duties. Though today you have no feelings of lust time may come when they will raise their head and you can fall prey to that lust which has ruined greatest yogis. If you ignore your wife today you will fall in the clutches of some other woman and that will ruin you. It is not that you should abandon your Karmas but that the Karmas should abandon you. There is also another purpose in sending you back home. *You also have some responsibility of advancing the Dharma. The initiation towards acquiring knowledge of the Brahman which I have given you is a powerful spark which will cause the light to spread all over India at the proper time. For that you must be a leader and a Guru.* For that you must be engaged in your *sadhana* and remember that you are a mere instrument in this. *Sadhana* done with the desire of becoming a Guru leads to ego and downfall. You will gain greatly if you do it with a sense of duty, with desire for knowledge, bowing to the Guru principle. Also remember that without inner capability mere outer looks and decorations are useless. I can actually see that by the divine means that I have given you and by my blessings you will definitely be a king in the spiritual field and that splendour will be infinitely greater than that of the worldly kingdom. Your fame will spread far and wide. Do not worry and may you prosper." He gave him his personal copy of Gita saying that the book contains extreme synthesis of the four paths: knowledge, devotion, action and yoga, and the *sadhana* assigned to him would lead to the development of all the four paths in him. Asking him to read the book daily he then bade him farewell.

Kalikishore left but instead of immediately going home spent some time in a village called Kanthelu attracted by the natural beauty of the surroundings with a river and a cave near a Shiva temple suitable for his *sadhana*. However his mother came to know his whereabouts in a dream and arranged through the postmaster of Kanthelu to bring him home. He realised it was his Guru's doing. Everybody, and most of all, his wife (though she very well knew he was not interested in family life) were happy at his homecoming. He managed a small job of eight rupees per month which barely augmented the family income but which permitted him to continue his *sadhana*. In 1897 his father died and the responsibility of the family fell entirely on Kalikishore.

Kalikishore moved with his family to a quiet village called Vinitia in Dhaka district in search of livelihood and found a job with the local landlord. His *sadhana* of course continued. One day he brought a beautiful picture of Goddess Kali and added it to the group of the deities he used to worship daily. He had brought it because he did not have his Guru's picture and he considered that the power of his Guru was contained in the Goddess Kali. His reading of books on religious and spiritual philosophy like Upanishads continued. He had complete support of his wife in his spiritual endeavours.

It was the Kojagiri Pournima day of 1908, Kalikishore's thirty-ninth birthday. Kalikishore sat for his evening worship and after the *arati* and while the final *Mantra-pushpanjali* was being recited, energy started entering Kalikishore's body. He began to shiver vigorously, lost consciousness and fell down. The bright aura and the blissful appearance of his face indicated that there was no illness but his lying still with no noticeable breathing frightened his sister. He recovered in a short time but was somewhat tired. He was still sobbing and calling for "mother" (implying Goddess Kali). The entire day and night were spent in this emotional state. Next day he started crying and calling for "mother" again and again. Suddenly he went into trance and had the vision of Goddess Kali who assured him that everything was all right. He remembered his Guru and realised that exactly 19 years 6 months and 13 days had passed since his initiation. He also remembered being told that this active power will lead him to the right place. He wrote to his Guru but he had already passed away.

His occult experiences continued and one day his Guru instructed him in a vision to go towards north-east. Now his fears vanished. One night, around midnight a strong desire to worship the Kali idol overtook him and when he was bathing the idol it started becoming brighter. Others also noted this incident. They realised that his touch caused the idol to shine. He had now developed the power to transfer energy to others and awaken the *Kundalini* just as his Guru had done to him. It had taken about twenty years to develop this power through an intense *sadhana*. He remembered his Guru's words that "*You also have some responsibility of advancing the Dharma. The initiation towards acquiring knowledge of the Brahman which I have given you is a powerful spark which will cause the light to spread all over India at the proper time*." A new phase started in his life.

Then, on an auspicious day in 1910 he initiated his wife, sister and younger brother in the same manner he himself had been initiated, by making them sit after bath on individual seats in front of him with closed eyes and transferring his energy to all the three at the same time. His disciples grew in numbers. He decided to build a temple to Goddess Kali, a task in which they all helped. He himself began to live in the temple. One day he got a strong desire for adopting *sanyasa*. He did that formally from the Chief of the Jagannathpuri Math adopting Narayantirtha Saraswati as the new name.

He came to be well known in the surrounding region and received many spiritually minded visitors from all strata of society and religions. For their sake he established in the temple a spiritual centre and named it Jnyana Sadhan Math or a Math (spiritual centre) for seeking knowledge which in spiritual parlance is same as liberation. The stress in this Math was not on discussions and lectures but on personal experience which Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was now capable of imparting through awakening of *kundalini*.

Atmananda Prakash and Yogeshchandra In 1910 an eighteen year old youth named Rohinikumar from Chitalkot in Vikrampur Paragana of Dhaka district came to Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. Before accepting him as an acolyte (Brahmachari) Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj took a vow of celibacy from him. He was initiated by *Shaktipat* system and renamed as Atmananda Prakash Brahmachari (*see later*). But before letting him adopt *sanyasa*, Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj wanted him to return home and spend time with his family. He was to come back to him after satisfying his family and taking their permission. Atmananda Prakash therefore returned to his home in Chitalkot. Even though only a Brahmachari (pre-*sanyasa*) Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj had authorised him to initiate his own disciples if found suitable.

Next divine coincidence in the chain of events occurred when Atmananda Prakash returned to Chitalkot. A young man by name Yogeshchandra Chakravarty from Dhaka had left home in search of a Guru and was inexplicably inspired to go to Chitalkot. While wandering in the village he noticed a young man dressed in white in the typical Bengali style walking in the courtyard of a house. He had applied ash on his body. Wishing to make some enquiries from the young man he entered the courtyard and in the first meeting itself the two became friends. Yogeshchandra became disciple of Atmananda Prakash. After taking the vow of celibacy he was renamed Yogeshchandra Prakash Brahmachari. The difference in age between this Guru-disciple pair was only two years. (See later about details of Yogeshchandra). After some days the two went to Vinitia where Atmananda Prakash gave *Shaktipat* initiation to Yogeshchandra in the presence of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. The two remained in Jnyana Sadhan Math for six to seven years in the service of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. By 1920 the number of disciples increased so much that the present place became insufficient. After careful considerations it was shifted to a bigger place at Madaripur on the banks of river Medha amidst picturesque woods. There was a very big *banyan* tree here under which several hundred people could sit for discourses. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj built a Shiva temple under the tree and created a beautiful garden.

Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was very careful in choosing or accepting a person for initiation but this was done without regard for his caste or religion. He looked for the sincerity of desire for spiritual pursuit and whether the person has the tenacity to follow the routines regularly. He had the power of detecting false-

hood and insincerity. Once a Brahmin who could impress everyone with his learning came to him with a request for initiation but was sent away saying that he would consider it at some other time. Couple of days later a pious Muslim dressed in soiled clothes and who could hardly speak pure language came with the same request and was initiated immediately after fixing a suitable day. he explained this using analogy of a light bulb. He said that an electric bulb will light up when switched on only if wired properly. If the electric fitting is not proper how can the bulb light?

Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj used to be particular about the behaviour of his disciples and insisted that every moment spent in the Math should be spent usefully. He was strict but a kind person. When the *Shaktipat* initiation is given, if the person to be initiated suffers from any illness it can get transferred to the Guru. But Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj never bothered about it and accepted the illnesses of his disciples. In one such initiation he received an incurable intestinal disease of the disciple but he gladly accepted it and finally passed away due to it in 1935. Before leaving the body he sat in yogic posture, repeated the Upanishadic phrase, "Sarvam Khalvidam Brahmam", *everything here is Brahman*, four times and finally uttering *Aum*, left his body. His wife Sarojinidevi passed away a month later. The disciples constructed Samadhi structures and began their worship. Their daughter and son-in-law continued to look after the Math. The giant banyan tree was uprooted in a cyclonic storm in 1960 and the Shiva temple cracked but was later repaired. The place is now in Bangla Desh and not easily accessible.

Shankar Purushottamtirtha Shri Atmananda Prakash mentioned above was born in 1890 as Rohinikumar the son of Prasannakumar Chattopadhyaya and his wife Durgasundari. His mother died when he was only five years old. He however began to consider Goddess Kali as his mother and used to say that her idol talked to him. Since childhood he used to sit for meditation along with his father and used to go into deep trance. He left school when he was in tenth standard and started spending his time in meditation and meeting holy persons. He had a strong desire to have a Guru and one day the Guru appeared in his dream. He searched for his whereabouts without success. Then somebody advised him to meditate on Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with the desire of finding his Guru's whereabouts in mind.



Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha

He meditated with a photo of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa before him and one day he came in a vision and told him his Guru's name showing him what he looked like. Now Rohinikumar began his search again and located Shri Narayantirtha Saraswati at Vinitia. As mentioned earlier he was initiated in 1910. After his return to his Guru in 1926 he was allowed to adopt *sanyasa* formally through the hands of the Shankaracharya of Puri and was renamed Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha. On his Guru's instructions he travelled to Varanasi, Uttarkashi and other places in the Himalayas. In 1932 he established the Shankar Math in Uttarkashi. In 1934 he established another Math called Siddhayogashram in Varanasi. In 1926 he wrote a book titled Yogavani to explain *Shaktipat*yoga to seekers. He took samadhi in 1958.

Swami Loknath Tirth Now we shall go into the details of the last link in the chain of events which brought *Shaktipat* yoga to Maharashtra. The story of Yogeshchandra Chakravarty who was initiated by Shri Atmananda Prakash described earlier is again shows guidance by the divine hand. Yogeshchandra was the son of the chief priest of Dhakeshwari temple situated in north-east of Dhaka city. It was a temple with fair income and the Chakravarty family was quite well-to-do. Yogeshchandra was born in 1892. He was an intelligent boy with sharp memory. He picked up the techniques of worship with the relevant chants very quickly from his father. He had the habit of sitting for meditation in some obscure corner or room of the temple. He liked to look after the feeding and watering of the cows in the stable. He used to take part in the singing of *bhajans* in the temple and become quite entranced. After his thread ceremony in his eighth year he could take part in the worship rituals of the temple. It is customary in Bengal to offer animal sacrifice to the Goddess and goats used to be regularly sacrificed on a platform in front of the temple. The actual killing was done by the chief priest with the help of others. When Yogeshchandra became older he also had to do it. Being part of the tradition nobody feels much about this sacrifice and everybody including Yogeshchandra took it as a matter of course just as it used to be done in the yajnas in Vedic times. Bengali Brahmins are basically fish eaters and so was Yogeshchandra until he was initiated as sanyasi.

His father died at the age of about thirty-two and the responsibility of the family which included mother, younger brother and sister fell on Yogeshachandra when he was only about twelve years old. He began to face many difficulties. There was a draught. The farm-tenants would not give his share of the crop and the income from temple became insufficient for maintaining the family. Somehow he managed his studies up to fifth standard and then found a clerk's job in a jute factory. During all these hard times he always prayed to Mother Kali for guidance. During the anti-British movement against partition of Bengal he left his job and joined the revolutionaries but found after some time that he did not fit in and left. All the time he continued praying to Mother Kali for guidance and for guiding him towards a Guru. And one night She showed him his Guru in a vision and also the name of the village where he would be found and the signs by which he can identify the house. This was in about 1912 when he was just twenty years old.

Yogeshchandra quietly left his home and family and reached Chitalkot where, as mentioned earlier, he found his Guru Shri Atmananda Prakash. After the Guru disciple pair came to Vinitia Yogeshchandra was initiated in the presence of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. Thus started Yogeshchandra's spiritual *sadhana* in earnest at Jnyana Sadhan Math. In this Math all tasks were shared by the residents as service to their Guru as in the Ashrams of the Vedic times. The routine included pre-dawn meditation, management of the Math after sunrise, reading of religious and spiritual books after a little post lunch rest, discourse on Upanishads by the Guru followed by discussions and finally collective *sadhana*. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was particular about keeping everything simple and was strict about regularity.

Though spiritually exalting, the life on material plane was very hard, for it was the custom that noontime meals to all residents and visitors would be provided free by the Math and there were insufficient funds. The food came from the grains and other material received as alms for which all regular acolytes and *sanyasis* went daily in the neighbouring villages. This was augmented when necessary by "*arabi*" tuber roots which when boiled offered nutritive supplement. Firewood also had to be collected. The responsibility of arranging meals was assigned to Shri Atmananda Prakash who with the help of Yogeshchandra carried it well though it meant a lot of physical labour especially for chopping and bringing in the firewood. They had to walk long distances for alms and during the heavy monsoon rains they even had to often swim across the rivers.

The young Guru-disciple pair spent two years at the Math except for the short time during which Shri Atmananda Prakash was sent by his Guru home to meet his family and obtain their permission for adopting *sanyasa*. The actual ritual of *sanyasa* was however arranged much later, in 1926. He was renamed as Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj noticed that Yogeshchandra's spiritual progress

was very fast and he needed some independence and solitude for proper development. Soon after, Shri Atmananda Prakash went on a tour of the holy places in Bengal taking Yogeshchandra with him. In the course of time they reached Dhaka where Yogeshchandra was asked to go and live at his home while Shri Atmananda Prakash himself stayed in the Math of Tripurlinga Saraswati. The Math was large and rich and Tripurlinga Saraswati was highly respected even by learned pundits and had many disciples.

Yogeshchandra's family was surprised and happy to see him back. He set upon a daily program of early morning *sadhana*, serving the cattle and milking them. He took some milk to for his Guru who was in the Tripurlinga Saraswati Math remaining in his company doing small jobs for him like cleaning the room, washing clothes and utensils, going to post office etc. He would return home in the afternoon and again go back to his Guru in the evening. His mother was impressed by his behaviour and came to accept his new life of a *sanyasi*. He arranged for his younger brother to look after the family and arrange for the sister's marriage. One day he brought Shri Atmananda Prakash home and obtained her permission for adopting *sanyasa*. Shri Atmananda Prakash requested Tripurlinga Saraswati to conduct the Sanyasa ritual for Yogeshchandra and towards the end of 1914, when he was only twenty-one years old Yogeshchandra became a sanyasi and was renamed Chinmayananda Saraswati.

Tripurlinga Saraswati was highly impressed by this young pair of Guru and disciple. He was getting old and wanted a capable person to head the Math. First he requested Shri Atmananda Prakash to accept the position but to his surprise he declined this lucrative offer. The same offer was also made to Yogeshchandra who also declined saying that it would come in the way of his quest. After staying there for about eight months the pair left Dhaka for further travels and returned to Jnyana Sadhan Math for further guidance from their Guru. Again Swami Narayantirtha noted that Chinmayananda's progress was occurring fast and he needed both independence and solitude. He was therefore asked to search for a place by himself. He found a Shiva temple in a nearby village but returned after couple of months because of the disturbance from the local bad elements.

Shri Atmananda Prakash had gone in the meantime to Varanasi and with the permission of Swami Narayantirtha the *Shaktipat* technique had now reached Varanasi. Chinmayananda followed him there. Before he left, Swami told him that future of the path depended upon persons like him and God would see that all would go well. Also that he should always feel gratitude for the Guru tradition and pass what he has received from the tradition and Guru to others <u>adding his own contribution</u>.

After reaching Varanasi he sought Shri Atmananda Prakash. The latter took Chinmayananda and a few other disciples to various places in the Himalayas. Both were greatly attracted to Uttarkashi in particular. They returned to Varanasi in 1919 and arranged for Swami Narayantirtha to visit them. He did so and returned to Bengal in 1920 with Shri Atmananda Prakash.

Chinmayananda, now separated from his Guru went first to Rishikesh and a few months later entered the jungles of Tehri Gadhwal for his *sadhana*. Where all he went and how he survived is not known. But one day he heard in his ears a message instructing him that he should go south. First he ignored the message but when it was repeated twice more, the third time very forcefully, he left the jungles and returned via Uttarkashi, Devaprayag, Hardwar etc. to Hathras situated midway between Aligarh and Agra in U.P. He still had no idea as to where exactly he was supposed to go so he spent his time in an isolated temple. One day while in meditation he got a clear message from the Goddess that he should go further south, that his place of action was towards south and he was destined to spread the *Shaktipat* technique in that region; that She had blessed his grand-Guru Shri Narayantirtha and the spark which had been handed over to him would spread everywhere and that task was his; that he should not stop there but continue further towards south.

Now that he had received a clear message Swami Chinmayananda picked up his meagre belongings and came to the railway station. He had no money and he did not know where exactly to go. However a wealthy person approached him and asked him where he was going. He replied. "To south". The man purchased a ticket for Hoshangabad, how and why nobody knows, and gave it to him along with some fruits informing him that the train left at night. Next morning he reached Hoshangabad (about 30 Km north of Itarasi on Central railway in Madhya Pradesh) and walked along the banks of Narmada which is known there as Rewa. He walked to the Mangalwar Ghat, did his ablutions, bathed in the waters. He then walked up the steps of the Ghat to look for a place for rest and shelter. There are many Dharmashalas (Charitable rest houses) for pilgrims there. He enquired of the mendicants and sanyasis sitting around for a suitable place for shelter.

Now, it should be remembered that everybody dressed as a *sanyasi* may not be so in mind. Many are misguided persons who have missed their spiritual goal for want of the depth of desire for it and fallen in bad company of so-called *sadhus* or *sanyasis* who use narcotics and spend their time sitting in groups engaged in idle chit-chat. Many belong to a particular "*Akhada* " which a group headed by a chief who, instead of utilising his time in spiritual exercise, spends it in power politics and even fights with other Akhadas. Many young aspirants who have left their home for spiritual pursuit get impressed by their talk and fall into their trap becoming a misguided disciple of an unworthy Guru.

When these mendicants saw this boyish sanyasi they thought he was one of their type and decided to play a joke on him by directing him to a Dharmashala which was believed to be haunted and hence abandoned. They waited until the next day to watch the fun. At night many spirits did try to trouble Chinmayananda but he controlled them by his yogic powers and saw to it that they were liberated from that state by morning. After that none of the Sadhus bothered him. He could live in that Dharmashala undisturbed. Now the stage was set for further acts in the divine play to propagate the *Shaktipat* system to sincere seekers. In this act one Raobahadur Sadashivarao Parande, a sub-judge recently transferred from Nagpur to Hoshangabad played a key role.

Dadasaheb, as Raobahadur Parande was generally addressed by his family and friends, was a western educated learned person of good nature and moral behaviour, well read in Shastras and also practicing Yoga. He had read many books on Tantra system of spiritual pursuit and found that in an ancient book titled *Kularnava* it was mentioned that *Kundalini* could be awakened by what was called Vedha Diksha, (which can be roughly translated as initiation by concentrating on the person to be initiated from a distance). He thoroughly studied the book and was looking for a worthy person capable of using this technique. The Tantra system is more popular in Bengal region and he was particularly looking for some yogi or *sanyasi* from that region who might know the technique. He mentioned this to a Bengali lawyer named Chatterjee who consented to be on the lookout. As fate would have it Swami Chinmayananda one day visited his house for alms and as soon as the call for alms "Aum Bhavati Bhikshandehi" was heard he came out to meet him and realised this sanyasi with a bright aura was a Bengali. He enquired and learnt that he was camping at Mangalwar Ghat. That afternoon he met the sub-judge and told him about Swamiji. In the evening Dadasaheb took a walk to the Ghat, met and bowed to him. After some talks he invited Swamiji to his home for alms.

Next morning, Swamiji came to Dadasaheb's home. After alms were given Dadasaheb drew him into discussions and asked him if he knew of anybody who could give Vedha Diksha. Swamiji replied in the affirmative and when Dadasaheb requested for his address said, to his utter surprise that being a sanyasi he could not tell a lie and he himself could do it. Now, Dadasaheb had read a lot about the experiences of persons when *Kundalini* is awakened. How to verify whether Swamiji's claim was true? He did not want to try it on himself therefore he thought of a stratagem. There was one lawyer by name Narayanprasad Dube who was afflicted by a skin disease which was not responding to medication. Dadasaheb suggested to him that if he met Swamiji then his divine powers could cure him. Accordingly Dube met Swamiji the

next day, gave reference of the sub-judge and told him about his problem praying for his grace. Swamiji immediately asked him to come next morning after taking bath if he wanted the experience of awakening of *Kundalini*.

Next morning Dube went to Swamiji who merely asked him to remove his shirt and cap, wash hands and feet and sit in a normal posture on a seat spread on the ground (This is the *sahajasan posture* with crossed legs.) He asked him to close his eyes and to let happen whatever happens inside him. He also told him not to get frightened and to open his eyes after it happening stops. Couple of minutes after Dube took his position he started feeling something happening inside by itself. His legs tightened steadying his posture and his spine became erect. His initial nervousness stopped and a pleasant sensation began to flow through the spine. His eyes became tightly closed and he started swaying. After about forty-five minutes he opened his eyes. Swamiji asked him whether he had an experience to which he replied in the affirmative adding that he could not describe it. Swamiji reassured him that the results were excellent and that it would profit him if he came and sat with him for a week. Dube prostrated before Swamiji with great faith and left. He reported his experience to Dadasaheb that day in court.

Initiation of Vamanrao or Gulawani Maharaj Now, Dadasaheb used to be a regular visitor of Govindaswami who was camping in a Dattatreya temple situated on Kharra Ghat in Hoshangabad. Govindaswami was a disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati like Mr. Vamanrao Gulwani. He was an expert in Hathayoga and therefore Vamanrao had requested him for help in awakening his *Kundalini*. Actually that was the reason why Vamanrao had been camping in Hoshangabad. When Vamanrao came to Hoshangabad he had brought his mother Umabai with him and also called his three friends Shankarkaka Ajegaonkar, Kashinath Mahajan and Vaidya who were also ardent practitioners of Hathayoga. They heard from Dadasaheb about the recently arrived sanyasi who gave Shaktipat or Vedha Diksha in which the recipient does not have to do anything. They did not believe such a technique existed until Dadasaheb showed its mention in Kularnava book. He also told them about how Dube was initiated that very morning.

Next evening they all went and met Swamiji and were introduced by Dadasaheb. Nobody spoke but all were enjoying the blissful vibrations. In the corner was sitting Dube in a steady position with eyes closed but moving his neck in a circular fashion. He used to visit Swamiji both in the morning and in the evening. After some time he opened his eyes. Dadasaheb found from him that his skin problem was improving rapidly. Swamiji informed Dadasaheb in reply to his question about the nature of experiences that there are thousands of types of experiences which include postures, hand postures (*Mudra*), sounds, visions, breath control (Pranayama), laughing, crying and so on. Dube also informed them that within a matter of four or five days he was feeling happy and invigorated and his body felt light. They had a doubt about how this could be considered as a sign of *Kundalini* awakening. Swamiji explained in brief that as per the *Kundalini Shastra* its location is fixed and it is a form of energy. It is very powerful and induces bliss. Its qualities may be experienced after the initiation. Initially its activity starts in the Muladhar centre at the base of spine near the genitals. Slowly the posture becomes steady and one experiences energy, inspiration and bliss. After the meeting, on the way to home Dadasaheb expressed his wish that such a powerful technique should be spread in Maharashtra.

During the next fortnight many more people came to Swamiji and were initiated. The prospective disciples used to bring coconut, fruits and money as offering but Swamiji did not touch them and gave them back as *prasad.*

One day a calamity arose, caused by the intrinsic nature of *Kundalini* power. Purnanand, a resident of Hoshangabad belonging to the Aryasamaj sect (who believe in the Vedas but not in the caste system), was given initiation. Being interested in yoga, he had written to Pandit Satavalekar the well known expert on Vedas who had directed him to Govindaswami. While he was practicing yoga under his guidance he had learnt about Swamiji's presence in Hoshangabad. He met Swamiji with a request for initiation and was

asked to come the next morning. As soon as initiation was imparted Swamiji had acute stomach pain and had to rush to the latrine. When he returned he found Purnanand had profusely vomited. After cleanup they sat again but Swamiji again had loose motion and had to go to latrine three to four times. Curious, he asked Purnanand whether he had been poisoned anytime. Surprised, Purnanand confessed that he had been poisoned thrice in the past but had survived. He begged Swamiji's forgiveness for what had happened. Swamiji replied that in this Diksha nothing remained hidden and Guru suffered as much as the disciple, but the power of *Kundalini* took care of everything and purified the system. Purnanand was relieved. He bowed and returned. Swamiji did suffer for some time due to this incident. Purnanand became a close associate of Swamiji and began spending more and more time in meditation. This made his wife very angry with Swamiji and whenever she saw him used to sing a song which said, "Man becomes sanyasi shaving head while the home is ruined and his wife becomes as good as dead."

Now let us return to Vamanrao. He, his three friends and Dadasaheb Parande continued visiting Swamiji and discuss the progress of the initiated persons. But either out of their conservative nature or because they had not yet developed faith in the new system, in spite of the more than dozen examples before them, none of them requested Swamiji for his own initiation. They were critically observing this new process which to them was totally unfamiliar. So far their efforts and their knowledge of *Kundalini* awakening were limited to Hathayoga techniques which require a strict observation of postures and *pranayama*. However as they continued their association with Swamiji they developed confidence and Kashinath Mahajan was the first to request for initiation as he had to leave for his hometown. Swamiji promised to initiate him some time later when he visited his hometown since he was still not quite well after the Purnanand's initiation. However when next morning Mahajan had gone to Swamiji to bid farewell he initiated him through touch. Mahajan was passing through the yogic processes automatically for an hour after the initiation. Swamiji instructed him to continue this *sadhana* and not to tell his experiences to anyone. But when he met his friends to tell them the good news, Vamanrao insisted that he tell them what exactly transpired. His Guru had told him not to tell anyone and on the other hand he could not displease his close friends therefore he sat again in the posture and automatically passed through the yogic processes again, his whole body gyrating accompanied by a certain fast breathing process called *Bhasrika*. This resulted in the removal of all doubts from their minds about the new system.

A week later, noticing that Swamiji's health was still not improving and going out for alms became difficult, Vamanrao, with his mother's permission, invited Swamiji to live in his home. Swamiji, who had noted the goodness in Vamanrao agreed and thus a new phase started. Swamiji's health improved fast under his mother's care and nourishment. He noticed the strict daily routine of Vamanrao including his practice of Hathayoga and *pranayama* for awakening *Kundalini*. One day he saw his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in his dream who told him that he was not different from Swamiji, his technique of *Kundalini* awakening belongs to Datta-tradition and also that a lot of work lies ahead for him. One day he requested Swamiji for initiation but Swamiji told him that since he was trying the *pranayama* system for awakening *Kundalini* he should continue to do so, it being not proper to interfere in the work of others. He also promised to do the initiation at proper time. Now Vamanrao had only to wait for the proper time. Since 1907 Vamanrao had always visited Narsobawadi on Gurudwadashi day. But this year in 1922 he did not go and remained with Swamiji. On the *dwadashi* (twelfth) day of the dark fortnight of Kartik month Swamiji had gone for an evening walk with Vamanrao and others. He decided to return home early.

At home Swamiji asked Vamanrao what he had gained by *pranayama* practice and whether his *Kundalini* was awakened by it. Vamanrao answered that it leads to feeling of lightness in the body but as yet it had not led to the *Kundalini* awakening. Swamiji asked him how long he was going to toil like this, to which Vamanrao replied that it depended on Swamiji. Swamiji was seated on a cot and Vamanrao on a carpet on the ground. Swamiji asked Vamanrao to close his eyes and immediately energy entered Vamanrao's body. His body began gyrating, jumping up nearly half a metre high like a frog. Breathing became very fast

but regular. The state lasted for about one hour. Vamanrao was experiencing something he was longing for and had not experienced before. He had achieved his goal.

After about a week Vamanrao left with Swamiji for Barshi making a detour to visit many hilly places in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. They visited the Jyotirlinga Ghrishneshwar, Ajanta Frescoes etc, Janardanswami's *samadhi* at Daulatabad and so on. They also stopped at Hingoli, the native village of Shankarrao Ajegaonkar where he initiated Shankarrao's brother Dattatreya. Swamiji then returned to Hoshangabad accompanied by Dattatreya who wanted to serve his new Guru. Back in Hoshangabad more people were initiated including Dadasaheb Parande. In between he went to Amaravati where Parande was transferred. Later in 1924 Vamanrao invited him to Barshi where a useful and happy time was spent by the local seekers in the company of Swamiji. He was also taken to Pandharpur. Swamiji initiated many people including Vamanrao's mother Umabai and sister Godavari. On return to Hoshangabad Swamiji wrote to Vamanrao authorising him to initiate new disciples starting with Gopikabai, wife of Vedmurthy Pralhadshastri Joshi. This initiation was done on Ananatachaturdashi day on 12 September 1924.

In 1926 Vamanrao left Barshi and joined NMV high School in Pune. On his invitation Swamiji came to Pune for the first time in 1928. Vamanrao used to live in a rented house at 20 Narayan Peth from 1926 to 1964. Swamiji often came to Pune and live with his disciple at this place months at a time from 1928 to 1951. It is in this place that Vamanrao reached his spiritual heights. He was now called Gulawani Maharaj or Guru Maharaj by his numerous disciples.

Swamiji travelled a lot in Maharashtra. In 1927 he went to Varanasi where he met his Guru Atmananda Prakash, now Shankar Purushottam Tirtha after Dandi sanyasa. On Swamiji's request he initiated him as Dandi sanyasi on 30th January and was renamed as Shri Loknath Tirtha. He came to Pune many times and lived with his disciples, especially Gulawani Maharaj. His last visit to Pune was in 1952. He travelled all over India and during final years settled in Varanasi where finally on 9th February 1955 took samadhi after suffering from deteriorated health for some months. Jambuvantsingh, one of his close disciples was with him serving him throughout his illness. He had wished to see Gulawani Maharaj in his last moments but out of his love for his Guru he was engaged in performing readings of Gurucharitra to ameliorate the illness but it did not bear fruit.

Swami Loknath Tirtha was a very learned person expert in Shastras as well as Tantras and had attained Siddhis which he rarely used. He believed in the behaviour prescribed in the Smritis and was frankly critical if any seeker behaved improperly. He faced life dispassionately as it came, never accepting anything from anyone more than what was required for bodily survival. Even good people have enemies and once he suffered ill health for months because of some black magic done on him. But he survived all calamities by the grace of his family deity Mother Kali to whom he was extremely devoted and as told by people She also was always present with him up to the last moment. Swamiji initiated hundreds of disciples and the spark was kept alive by Gulawani Maharaj and his successors.

Now we close this series on Datta-devotees by saying Jai Gurudevadatta.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.

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